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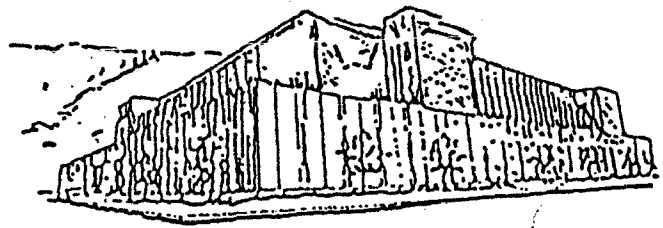
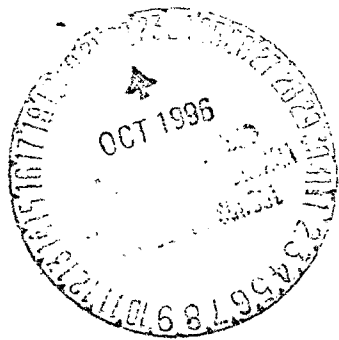
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Thoughts During Marital Conflict: A Topography and a Comparison  
of Physically Aggressive and Nonaggressive Couples

Tim Dun

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

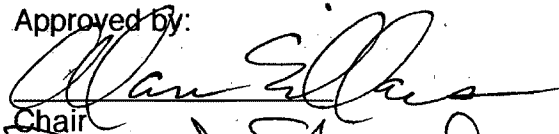
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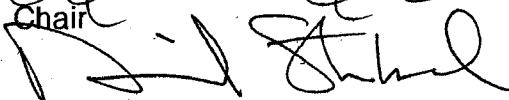
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1996

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Chair

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Date

I would like to thank the coding team: Jennifer Brodsky, Shannon Finnan, Karissa Reinke, and Michelle Crepeau. Funding for the Marital Interaction Project, which provided the recall data, was supported by grant R01-AA08128 awarded to K. E. Leonard by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

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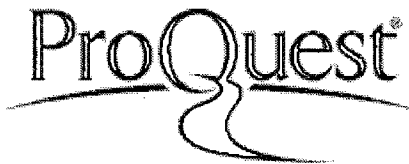


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Dun, Tim, M.A., December, 1996

Communication Studies

# Thoughts During Marital Conflict: A Topography and a Comparison of Physically Aggressive and Nonaggressive Couples

Director: Dr. Alan Sillars



Thoughts and emotions are an important component of interpersonal conflict. This study examined spouses' patterns of thoughts and emotions experienced during a discussion of marital conflict. First, a broad description of these thoughts and emotions was generated; then, the differences and similarities between violent and nonviolent marital dyads were explored. Additionally, effects of gender and marital adjustment on thoughts and feelings were investigated. All of these investigations explored how couples selectively monitor and interpret their own communication during intimate conflict.

To reconstruct thought patterns during intimate conflict, a video-assisted recall procedure was utilized. Seventy-three couples participated in the study, including thirty-one physically aggressive couples. After engaging in a discussion of marital conflict, participants were shown a videotape of their own interaction and were asked to attempt to re-experience what they thought and felt as the conversation unfolded. Subsequently, recalled thoughts and emotions were coded and analyzed. The analyses included spouses' emotions, communication strategies, reactions to their partners' behavior (or communication strategies), and their general appraisal of self, partner, and conflict issues.

Physically aggressive couples differed from nonaggressive couples in their attention to the content of the discussion and the process of the interaction. Nonaggressive participants were more likely to focus on issues and upon the direction of the discussion, the expected outcome, than physically aggressive couples. Also, physically aggressive husbands had a self-serving bias, viewing themselves as positive, constructive communicators while they saw their wives as avoiding. These three key differences illustrate ways in which thought patterns may influence dysfunctional communication during conflict.

Marital adjustment did not account for a large amount of variance in thoughts and emotions. However, there were many effects of gender. Most noteworthy, wives were partner-focused, whereas husbands were self-focused. Also, wives monitored avoidance more closely than did husbands. These and other differences confirm previous studies' results showing women's communication skill in empathy, and they also suggest strengths in men's communication.

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	1
Rationale .....	3
Methods .....	22
Results .....	28
Discussion .....	53
Appendix A	
Coding Procedures .....	67
Appendix B	
Thematic Subcategories and Percentage of Codable Responses .....	101
References .....	102

## List of Tables

Table 1	
Matrix of Positive and Negative Engagement and Avoidance Strategies.....	6
Table 2	
Number of Responses by Thematic Domain.....	28
Table 3	
Percentage of Emotion Codes by Actor .....	30
Table 4	
Strategy Codes by Actor .....	31
Table 5.	
Responses in Appraisal Domain.....	35
Table 6	
Percentage of Responses for Understanding and Not Understanding by Perspective.....	38
Table 7	
Uncodable Responses.....	39

## List of Figures

Figure 1	
Condensed Listing of Thematic Codes.....	27
Figure 2	
Effects of Group and Gender on Constructive Engagement-Self.....	43
Figure 3	
Effects of Group and Gender on Thoughts of Disagreement.....	45
Figure 4	
Effects of Group and Gender on Thoughts about Solutions.....	46
Figure 5.	
Effects of Group and Gender on Issue Appraisals.....	47
Figure 6	
Significant Main Effects of Aggressive versus Nonaggressive Group.....	51
Figure 7	
Significant Main Effects of Gender.....	52



## Introduction

Intimate conflict has an ambiguous nature. On one hand, spouses define themselves and their marriage through conflict, and it enables both relationship and personal growth. However, there is also a dark side to intimate conflict. In extreme cases, it can lead to marital discord and violence. This violence is a significant societal problem. Straus and Gelles (1990) note that one in six households experience violence annually. They also note that one third of women are abused by their husbands over the course of their marriage. Furthermore, marital aggression has been linked to both child and sexual abuse (Cahn, 1995). Thus, conflict is a communication process that can lead to satisfying, rewarding relationships and families or to violent marriages and dysfunctional families. Although marital violence is an extreme form of conflict, it is partly explained by interpersonal processes that affect conflict in general. These processes include communication patterns and related cognitions which contribute to dysfunctional conflict.

Efforts to understand dysfunctional intimate conflict have preceded in several directions. Two prominent avenues are interaction research and attribution theory. The former has identified patterns of conflict that differentiate aggressive from nonaggressive couples. Research into attributions about conflict involves the differing interpretations of conflict interactions by conflict parties. However, attribution theorists have had little direct access to thoughts that occur during intimate conflict. Similarly, interaction studies focus on the communication and have no access to the thoughts and perceptions driving communication behaviors. In their review of ten to fifteen years of research, Feldman and Ridley (in press) note that there is little empirical examination of the causes of violence. They suggest that increased attention to "cognitive

components and processes underlying interpersonal violence” is needed (p. 29). This attention should bridge gap between attribution theory and our knowledge of the interaction patterns in dysfunctional marriages to explain how different ways of thinking about conflict lead to different outcomes.

Understanding the thoughts and emotions driving communication in violent relationships may lead to avenues to reduce violence. Furthermore, this understanding may also unlock general processes which affect conflict escalation in all intimate relationships.

The present study utilized a video-assisted recall procedure to access the connection between conflict processes and cognitions. The procedure was designed to reconstruct spouses' thoughts *during* a discussion of a salient marital conflict. Participants were shown a videotape of their own interaction and were asked to re-experience what they thought and felt as the conversation unfolded. Thus, the research accessed couples' “on-line” feelings and emotions during conflict. Their thoughts and feelings were analyzed to explore differences between aggressive and nonaggressive couples. In addition to aggression, I also analyzed the effects of marital satisfaction upon thoughts during conflict. The analyses included spouses' emotions, communication strategies, reactions to their partner's behavior (or communication strategies), and their general appraisal of self, partner, and the issues. Thus, the research constructed a detailed topography of thoughts and emotions experienced during marital conflict. I used this topography of thoughts during conflict to answer the question, “Which aspects of a conflictual discussion are more salient to aggressive versus nonaggressive couples?”

## Rationale

The literature on marital conflict provides a foundation to start my investigation. My review begins with patterns of communication, both as reported by couples and as noted by observers. Since the present study accesses on-line cognition about communication patterns, the study builds upon our extant knowledge of these patterns. The current investigation also connects behavioral and cognitive perspectives on intimate conflict. Therefore, another important cornerstone in the foundation is the relationship between cognition and communication. After reviewing cognition and communication, I review the factors that differentiate violent from nonviolent marriages. However, conflict behavior is the starting point for the review.

### Patterns of Communication.

The present study explores spouses' perceptions of the communication behaviors in their own discussion. Current understanding of communication behaviors, based on observational and self-report studies, has generated general typologies for classifying these behaviors and the couples themselves. Furthermore, researchers have found clear connections between satisfaction and conflict behaviors. Also, in Fitzpatrick's (1977) typology, couple types are defined in part by their conflict style. For example, Independents engage in conflict, Separates avoid conflict, and Traditionals appear to have less conflict, partly because they avoid it (Sillars, Pike, Jones, & Redmon, 1983) and because they have well-defined roles that attenuate conflict. Therefore, a couple's approach to conflict and their behaviors in conflict are seen as trans-situational patterns.

There are a variety of different conflict behaviors from which couples may choose. A common division of behaviors is between engaging and avoiding.

Engaging the other in conflict includes everything from physical violence to collaborative problem solving. Thus, one can engage either positively or negatively. Similarly, avoidance behaviors vary from positive to negative. Canary, Cupach, and Messman (1995) conclude that one type of avoidance is "blatant, direct and controlling: the other type is subtle, indirect and disengaging" (p.122). The first is clearly negative, like leaving the room and slamming the door or refusing to speak. On the other hand, the second is ambiguous and could be a functional strategy for some couples. For example, Traditional couples are more satisfied than Independents but are more likely to avoid conflict (Fitzpatrick, 1988).

Avoidance and withdrawal have been treated differently by various researchers. Noller, Feeney, Bonnell, and Callan (1994) note that there is disagreement about whether withdrawal is positive or negative. Some researchers have made the mistake of coding all non-engagement behaviors as withdrawal, which misses the distinctions that Canary and colleagues (1995) note. Furthermore, Canary et al. state that the yardstick by which conflict behaviors are judged as positive or negative is whether they are functional or dysfunctional for the relationship. Thus, similar avoidance behaviors could be functional in some relationships and dysfunctional in others. A further complication is determining which behaviors are in fact avoidance. For example, Sillars and Wilmot (1994) note that topic shifting is a form of avoidance and that it can also become a source of conflict. Control of topic is the conflict issue in cross-complaining (Gottman, 1979). Thus, topic shifting develops beyond an avoidance strategy and becomes the conflict (Sillars & Wilmot). In other words, a couple can argue about which topic to discuss. Another complication is lying. While Noller et al. (1994) treat lying as a negative

engagement strategy (manipulation), Sillars and Wilmot note that denying conflict is a form of lying. Thus, lying is an ambiguous strategy. Avoidance occurs both as a strategy during conflict and as method to avoid conflict in the first place.

Most research on avoidance and withdrawal focuses on observed behaviors during a problem solving or conflictual discussion and reported behaviors during conflict. However, Roloff and Cloven (1990) found that dating partners report keeping complaints to themselves. There was a positive relationship between the power of one's partner (operationalized by their perceived ability to find a better relationship with someone else) and the likelihood that one would not express complaints to the partner. This "chilling effect" reduces conflict by avoiding it on an entirely different level from communicative strategies. With the chilling effect, one does not storm from the room, make an equivocal response, or change the topic. Instead the couple never discusses the issue; there is no expressed struggle and no conflict (according to definitions of conflict in the communication field).

The differences between positive and negative forms of engagement are clearer. Addressing positive communication behaviors, Sillars and Wilmot (1994) note that "virtually all communication texts and training programs encourage individuals to practice some version of the analytic style, under the assumption that it is the most underdeveloped and underutilized style" (p. 173). The analytic style involves problem solving and discussion of issues (not people). There is also agreement among researchers that coercion and manipulation are negative forms of engagement (Noller et al., 1994). Disagreement is also generally treated as an aversive form of engagement. Another highly aversive strategy is verbal aggression which, due to its clear link

with physical aggression, will be discussed later in the section pertaining to marital violence. To summarize, conflict styles can be classified according to the dimensions of avoidance--engagement and positivity--negativity. Including ambiguous behaviors, this classification results in a three-by-three matrix which is depicted in Table 1. Sillars and Wilmot, in a review of four of Sillars' earlier studies, found that married couples averaged 25% analytic statements, 25% confrontive statements (negative engagement), 8% conciliatory statements, and 42% for avoidance, indirect statements and humor.

Table 1

Matrix of Positive and Negative Engagement and Avoidance Strategies

	Engaging	Ambiguous	Withdrawing
<u>Positive</u>	Analytic Style Informational		
<u>Ambiguous</u>			Topic Shifting
<u>Negative</u>	Verbal Aggression Manipulation Coercion	Lying	Stonewalling

Patterns of conflict behaviors reveal more about the couple than individual behaviors viewed in isolation. Differences between more skillful communicators and couples with fewer conflict management skills are evident in the systematic properties of communication behaviors (Sillars & Wilmot, 1994). Variety is seen as a quality of competent communicators. Lack of variety is seen in rigid, reactionary patterns and the inability to communicate in certain way (e.g., humor, problem solving). So these couples' thoughts would either be reactionary, or focused on a single track. Rigidity is a systemic behavior that

could be included with lying, stonewalling, and the other negative communication behaviors above. Understanding of dysfunctional conflict behavior has also grown by comparing the communication that occurs in satisfying and dissatisfying marriages. Thus, I explore the connection between satisfaction and interpersonal behaviors.

### Satisfied and Dissatisfied Couples

Much research has focused on the communicative differences between functional marriages and problematic ones. The difference has been operationalized by comparing couples who seek counseling with nonclinic couples, or by splitting couples into two groups based on their self-reported marital adjustment. Both methods yield similar results and are reviewed simultaneously. The clearest and least surprising finding is that dissatisfied spouses are more negative than satisfied spouses (Canary et al., 1995; Margolin & Wampold, 1981; Noller et al., 1994). Canary et al. concluded from their review that "in general, those in dissatisfied marriages are more likely to demonstrate sarcastic, critical, hostile, coercive, and rejecting behaviors (including withdrawal)" (p. 108). On the other hand, satisfied couples have at least a 5:1 ratio of positive to negative behaviors (Gottman, 1994). Satisfied couples appear to regulate their conflict and are more involved in issues (Margolin & Wampold, Noller et al.), and make more conciliatory statements (Sillars et al., 1983). Thus, dissatisfied couples tend to have a distributive approach to conflict (Canary et al.). These distributive behaviors act on the assumption that since one spouse will prevail and the other will lose, one should attempt to win at the other's expense. On the other hand, satisfied couples use more integrative conflict management skills. These skills are not founded upon the "win-lose" theory of conflict.

Researchers have also found sequential patterns of behavior that distinguish satisfied from dissatisfied couples. These patterns are more revealing than differences in the overall base rate of positive and negative behaviors. Gottman (1982) found two patterns that differentiated dysfunctional couples, referred to as "cross-complaining" and "counterproposal". Both patterns involve spouses engaging each other without directly acknowledging the other's statement, and therefore, they represent negative forms of engagement. Another pattern found to distinguish distressed from nondistressed couples is demand/withdraw. This is an asymmetrical pattern in which one spouse engages while the partner withdraws. In this pattern, it is more common that the wife demands and the husband withdraws (Gottman, 1994). Gottman has observed a similar four-behavior pattern that is extremely negative. The interaction starts with "*complaining/criticizing* (about some features of the partner) [which] leads to *contempt* (i.e., acting as if sickened by the partner), which in turn leads to *stonewalling* (i.e., emotional withdraw and refusal to participate in conversation)" (p. 111). Also studying withdrawal, Roberts and Krokoff (1990) found that husbands' withdrawal predicted wives' hostility in dissatisfied marriages. In sum, the extant literature on patterns of communication is a rich source of information about marital conflict. The differences in conflict behaviors indicate that satisfied couples more closely monitor their partner and conflict issues, and they are less motivated by self-interest. On the other hand, dissatisfied spouses seem to be more reactive and distributive. Furthermore, the literature indicates that careful attention must be paid to confrontive versus collaborative engagement. It also suggests that the differing forms of avoiding conflict should be not be amalgamated since avoidance behaviors vary in their impact. The present study builds on the



extant knowledge of conflict interactions. The functional and dysfunctional patterns of marital communication are driven by couples thoughts and feelings during conflict.

### Cognition and Communication

Knowledge of spouses' perceptions and interpretations of their interaction is as valuable for understanding marital communication as knowledge of the actual behavior (Guthrie & Noller, 1988). Goals and attributions are important elements of cognition that affect communication. Furthermore, the relationship between cognition and conflict is recursive, since communication and the communication situation also affect attributions, goals and cognitive functioning. Canary et al. (1995) argue that "research linking cognitive features to interpersonal interaction (especially in observational analyses) should stress how attribution, expectations, and the like are tied to interaction behavior" (p. 20). Cognitions are theorized to rest on actors' goals.

Spouses are assumed to act based on their identity (also called personal), relational, and other goals. Canary et al. (1995) note that valuing personal goals over relationship goals affects communication by increasing the likelihood of using distributive strategies, whereas valuing relationship goals leads to integrative communication strategies. Thus, a spouse's goals strongly influence communication behaviors. However, Sillars and Wilmot (1994) note that while sometimes people are strategic, at other times things "just happen". Spontaneity is the term they use to describe the conscious effort that spouses appear to invest in conflict. Highly spontaneous individuals would respond "off the cuff" (p. 181), while less spontaneous ones would be more contemplative. Expressed differently, during conflict people tend toward automatic processing; they are not doing "hard-core" processing (Fincham, Bradbury, & Scott, 1990).

However, even when things "just happen", cognitive processes could be in the background or the processing may have happened previously to set the pattern (Fincham, Bradbury, & Grych, 1990). In sum, personal and relationship goals drive conflict behavior either consciously and deliberately or automatically, in the background. The goals that drive intimate conflict interact closely with spouses' attributions for their partner's behavior.

### Attributions

Attributions made for marital events are the most studied aspect of cognitions in marriage (Fincham, Bradbury, & Scott, 1990). Fletcher and Fincham (1991) describe three cognitive styles in which spouses make attributions. These styles are the naive lawyer (who blames), naive scientist (who analyzes), and cognitive miser (who reacts). Fletcher and Fincham's three styles illustrate the intersection of a spouse's goals and reactivity. In other words, the spouse who is more concerned with personal goals than relationship goals is the naive lawyer. A less reactive spouse, perhaps one who is concerned about the relationship, is the naive scientist. The cognitive miser's style of making attributions fits the spouse who reacts automatically to their partner's behavior. The reactive style of the cognitive miser suggests rigid patterns of conflict behavior. While most research focuses on explanations for a partner's behavior, Holtzworth-Munroe and Jacobson (1988) note that attributions about self tend to justify or explain one's behavior. Aspects of attribution research relevant to the present study include the dimensions of attributions, positive and negative attributions, and the effects of attributions on both communication and relational satisfaction.

Attribution research largely concerns the dimensions of attributions, namely *internality*, *globality*, and *stability* (Canary et al., 1995). These

dimensions are used to determine whether attributions are benign or hostile and blaming. Hostile attributions are generally stable, global, and internal to partner and make the partner blameworthy. Different types of couples make different attributions. Not surprisingly, dissatisfied couples make more negative attributions (Canary et al.). In other words, distressed couples see more stable, global and internal causes for negative behaviors than nondistressed couples (Fincham, Bradbury, & Scott, 1990). There is also some support for the corollary; for positive behaviors, distressed couples make more unstable, local, and external attributions than nondistressed couples. Fincham and colleagues conclude that distressed couples' attributions serve to accentuate negative events by blaming their partner. Their attributions also minimize the impact of their partner's positive behaviors.

Conflict behavior is closely linked to attributions. For example, Fincham, Bradbury, and Grych (1990) note that attributions are most likely lead to retaliation "when the partner is seen to have deliberately violated a central relationship rule for which no extenuating circumstances can be found" (p. 174). Thus, there are clear links between hostile attributions and anger and violence. These links are explored in the next section. Fincham et al. also note that perceived benign behavior is associated with a positive response. While attributions are common in conflictual communication, they are infrequently verbalized. In their study, Holtzworth-Munroe and Jacobson (1988) found an average of .28 attributions per conflictual interaction. Thus, most couples did not make any attributional statements. However, negative behavior was correlated with the number of attributional statements (Holtzworth-Munroe & Jacobson; Fincham, Bradbury, & Scott, 1990). Therefore, while attributions are always an element of cognition during interpersonal conflict, they appear to be

more salient for negative events. In sum, negative events increase attributional thoughts, and attributions are strongly influenced by the couple's satisfaction. The attributions, in turn, influence behavior. The variety of personal and relationship goals, attributions, and perceptions combine to shape conflictual communication. Other factors also influence the connection between spouses' cognitions and marital outcomes.

### Inhibitory Factors

Many factors may inhibit or otherwise affect processing during conflict. Two important factors are stress and affect. Both stress and intense arousal have a negative impact on processing; they reduce the complexity of one's thinking (Fincham, Bradbury, & Grych, 1990, Sillars & Parry, 1982). Fincham et al. theorize that tension level should decrease the salience of the partner and increase the likelihood that a spouse will react to the mood or atmosphere. The atmosphere or, affect also influence cognition (Fincham, Bradbury, & Scott, 1990). For example, the salience of memories is contingent on mood. The influence of mood would cause an angry spouse to be more likely to access negative memories. Therefore, mood affects both attributions made for marital events and the "scripts" couples access for the automatic, spontaneous processing that often occurs in conflict.

### Aggression and Violence

The communication of aggressive couples is different from nonaggressive (both dissatisfied and satisfied) couples. Research on physically aggressive marriages is based on the previously reviewed broader understanding of marital conflict. Functional conflict processes are used as a baseline for comparison with the thoughts and behaviors of violent couples. I review research on marital violence, paying particular attention to

communication, cognitions, and relevant external factors such as alcohol. The review starts with the interactional differences between violent and nonviolent couples. For obvious reasons, this research does not have direct access to violent behavior. Instead, researchers either use self-report data about violent behavior or study conflict in a controlled setting and compare the conflict behavior of nonaggressive couples with the behavior of self-identified aggressive couples.

### Interactional Differences

Just as we can distinguish between dissatisfied and satisfied couples based on conflict behavior, researchers have found significant differences between the conflict behavior of violent and nonviolent couples. One difference between distressed and violent couples is suggested by Jacobson et al. (1994). They note that many researchers have found that women in distressed but nonviolent marriages display more negative affect and drive the behavior of distressed couples. However, they also note that "husbands may be the messengers of violence" (p. 987). In other words, it is the husband's behavior that distinguishes violent from nonviolent couples (Babcock, Waltz, Jacobson, & Gottman, 1993; Margolin, John, & Gleberman, 1988). For example, instead of the wife demand/husband withdraw pattern of distressed couples, Babcock et al. (1993) found the pattern reversed in physically aggressive couples. They noted a .40 correlation between husband demand/wife withdraw and marital violence. Furthermore, these men are more domineering (Rogers, Castleton, & Lloyd, 1995; Jacobson et al., 1994), more aversive (Babcock et al., 1993), and more defensive than nonaggressive couples (Jacobson et al., 1994). In sum, interaction research indicates that husbands in violent marriages behave

differently than men in nonviolent marriages, and their behavior has a large impact on the marital system.

In addition to focusing on the husbands' behavior, researchers have also studied the broader marital system in physically aggressive marriages. The marital system (both spouses' behavior) differs significantly from nonaggressive relationships. In a broad review of interaction research, Cahn (1995) notes that violent couples "behave in a more rigid, predictable, and escalating fashion" (p. 9). Specifically, violent couples tend to rigidly reciprocate negative behaviors (domineering, counter-controlling and verbal aggression) in comparison to nondistressed, nonviolent couples (Sabourin, Infante, & Rudd, 1993). While nonaggressive couples exhibit patterns of interaction that de-escalate conflict, aggressive couples do not (Burman, John & Margolin, 1992). The rigid escalation that distinguishes violent couples may indicate that these couples are less engaged by the current conflict and tend to think that "I've done this before." This thinking typifies the cognitive miser (Fletcher & Fincham, 1991). Sabourin and Stamp (1995) note that abusive couples' lives are less structured, yet they are unable to adapt and make changes. They are stuck.

Rigidity is an important systemic quality of abusive relationships, but there are others. In their review of research, Feldman and Ridley (in press) found that violent couples have more conflict and more serious conflict than nonviolent couples. Also, violent couples engage in more aversive behavior than distressed nonviolent couples (Cordova, Jacobson, Gottman, Rushe & Cox, 1993) and are more hostile than other conflictual couples (Burman, Margolin & John, 1993). Furthermore, Cahn's (1995) review notes that the interaction of violent couples shows "few constructive communication, social, negotiation, problem solving, and argumentation skills" (p. 10).

### Interaction and Communication Skills

Communication skills are a key area of study. Research has found a connection between lack of communication skill and physical aggression (e.g., Infante, Chandler, & Rudd, 1989). These researchers theorize that couples who lack the ability to argue effectively revert to verbal aggression, which in turn leads to violence. Violent husbands' "skill deficits are particularly notable in the area of request behavior, including the expression of needs and wants in a positive fashion" (Feldman & Ridley, in press, p.25). These data have been used to support skill deficit models of distressed couples which suggest that husbands use violence to compensate for a lack of communication skills. Unable to communicate effectively through a verbal channel, they communicate with violence.

In addition to using violence expressively, physically aggressive husbands may be instrumental in their use of violence. Lloyd and Emery (1994) note that "aggression is a highly potent conflict strategy for a variety of reasons, not the least being that it often works" (p 30). There is substantial support for the conclusion that men use violence to control their wives (e.g., Frieze & McHugh, 1992; Stamp & Sabourin, 1995). Jacobson et al. (1994) note that wives' fear of their abusive husbands allows "husbands to use violence as a means of psychological and social control" (p. 986). If husbands' desire to control their wives leads to aggression, we expect their thoughts during conflict to relate to this personal goal instead of relationship goals.

Lloyd's (1990) comparison of conflict types found that violent couples reported fewer "squabbles" than nonviolent couples. Squabbles were defined as conflicts in which a new topic was calmly discussed and was unresolved. These brief conflicts may be a safe and functional strategy for airing of new

disagreements. Lloyd theorized that spouses in violent marriages may try to solve each disagreement instead of dropping minor ones. Similarly, Burman et al. (1993) note the importance of de-escalation skills. They note that low conflict, nondistressed couples exhibit, "in a limited way," the same behaviors as physically aggressive couples (p. 28). However, nondistressed couples do not lock in to a rigid chain of behaviors; instead, they are able to quickly exit the pattern.

The present study builds upon the above differences between aggressive and nonaggressive couples, including violent couples' lack of functional communication skills. The literature draws a clear distinction between conflictual, distressed couples and physically aggressive couples. These marriages are qualitatively different. Violent relationships exhibit static, inflexible patterns of negative behavior that spiral destructively. Their rigidity includes a lack of skills that allow other couples to de-escalate conflict. Another important difference is the husbands in these relationships. Their negative behavior seems to drive the dysfunctional system. Their behavior could be explained as a conflict response tactic, a power/control tactic or a lack of impulse control (Feldman & Ridley, in press). The emotional impulses related to violence are examined next.

#### Emotion and Interaction

Retzinger (1991) notes that "very little is known about the role of emotions in human actions" (p.197), yet they play an important role in interpersonal violence. Lloyd (1990) aptly explained the joint effects of behavior and emotion in physically aggressive couples: "...[the] profile of conflict in the distressed-violent marriages [is] particularly volatile. The low level



of negotiation, combined with the high levels of anger and verbal attack, clearly suggest an explosive situation" (p. 280).

Anger is the most consistently mentioned emotion in the literature on family violence. For example, Jacobson et al. (1994) found that physically aggressive husbands were differentiated "by their preponderant use of the most provocative anger codes, especially belligerence and contempt" (p. 987).

Furthermore, Jacobson and his colleagues found that the wives' of these men were angrier than husbands! In another observational study, Burman et al. (1993) found that physically aggressive couples displayed more hostile affect, more contingent behavior involving anger, and more reciprocity of hostile affect than other conflictual couples. Clearly anger is more common in violent marriages and spouses in these relationships tend to more diligently monitor and react to their partner's anger.

What is anger? Cooley (1902/1964) explains anger, noting "we impute to the other person an injurious thought regarding something which we cherish as a part of our self, and this awakens anger...[that] rests upon a feeling that the other person harbors ideas injurious to us, so that the thought of him is an attack upon our self" (pp. 269-270). The connection between anger and aggression has been studied from several different perspectives. From a behavioral viewpoint, Infante's program of research on verbal aggression shows a clear link between verbal aggression and physical aggression (Infante et al., 1989; Infante and Wigley, 1986). The definition of verbal aggression, an attack on a person's self-concept (Infante and Wigley, 1986), is remarkably similar to Cooley definition of anger above. Infante and his colleagues have uncovered two important links between anger and verbal aggression. First, verbal attacks upon the self can trigger physical aggression. Second, physical aggression by

an individual is often preceded by verbal aggression by that individual.

Fincham, Bradbury and Grych (1990) provide a possible explanation in terms of the thought process behind this behavior, noting that attributions for spouses' actions "determine specific emotions" (p. 172).

Retzinger (1991) studied the connection between behavior, attributions, and anger. She posits a shame-rage interaction that starts with the partner threatening a spouse's attachment or bond. This threat to the relationship causes shame and disrupted bonding. Shame, for Retzinger, refers to a negative relational emotion varying from "mild embarrassment to intense forms such as humiliation or mortification" (p. 43). Then, the shame is denied and anger follows, which saves face but further threatens the self and the relationship (p. 56). The cycle is destructive and tends to create a pattern in which couples become stuck.

While anger is the most salient emotion in violent relationships, other emotions also play a role in marital aggression. Feldman and Ridley (in press) note that violent men label many emotions, such as hurt, jealousy and fear, as anger. Violent men are more jealous (Feldman & Ridley), which may be a causal factor in marital aggression (Lloyd & Emery, 1994). On the other hand, the emotions of women in physically aggressive relationships can be complex. Women have competing fear and anger (Jacobson, et al., 1994). They are angry because of abuse and they are afraid of abuse. "The ambivalence associated with these competing affective responses may be an important component of the experience of being in an abusive relationship" (Jacobson, et al., 1994, p. 987). Another emotion that differentiates violent from nonviolent couples is despair. Margolin, Burman, and John (1989) found increased despair in physically aggressive husbands. Sabourin and Stamp (1995) found

that aggressive couples were more despairing and less optimistic than nonaggressive, nondistressed couples. Fincham, Bradbury and Grych (1990) posit that helplessness results from low efficacy expectations. Thus, despair follows when spouses feel unable to manage or resolve conflict. In addition to interactional and emotional processes, alcohol use plays a role in marital violence.

Alcohol. Alcohol use, like the other background factors that may engender family violence, is not a cause; it increases the likelihood of abuse and acts as an aggravating factor. However, "alcohol use is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for abuse to occur" (Heyman, O'Leary, & Jouriles, 1995, p. 46). Tolman and Bennett's (1990) review of 13 studies found chronic alcohol abuse to be a better predictor of marital aggression than acute intoxication. One theory used to explain the effect of alcohol on marriage is the Marital Interaction Model which "posits that alcohol abuse results in increased marital conflicts and in turn that these conflicts put couples at risk for aggression, dissatisfaction..." (Heyman et al., p. 47). However, some studies of alcohol abuse and marital satisfaction have found little correlation between these two variables (e.g., Heyman et al., 1995; Murphy & O'Farrell, 1994). Murphy and O'Farrell theorized that husbands were not blamed for their abusive behavior because of their drinking, since alcohol is seen as an external, unstable cause of behavior. However, Senchak and Leonard (1994) found that husbands' alcohol did not affect wives' attribution of blame for marital violence. Further, husbands tended to accept responsibility for abuse when they were intoxicated. Senchak and Leonard noted that this last finding was counter-intuitive and suggested further study of the relationship between alcohol use and attributions of blame for abuse.

### Predictions

The wealth of information available from couples' on-line thoughts during conflict should reveal much about the relationships of "normal" and aggressive couples. The literature suggests many obvious expectations. To the extent that spouses are either dissatisfied or aggressive, I expect more negative thoughts about partner and the relationship, more reports of negative engagement strategies by partner and self, fewer reports of problem solving strategies and more reports of avoidance strategies. In other words, dissatisfied couples are expected to be more reactionary and use fewer collaborative communication skills than nondistressed spouses. Aggressive couples are expected to be more extreme than both satisfied and dissatisfied couples. Furthermore, I expect more reports of anger from the violent couples and that wives in violent marriages will withdraw more than wives in nonaggressive marriages.

On the other hand, previous research gives less clear guidance in making other predictions. Questions raised by other research that may be answered by this study include: Do nonaggressive couples focus more on conflict issues versus than aggressive couples? For example, are attributions for the partner's behavior or thoughts about who is winning the argument more salient than attention to the problem? Do nonaggressive couples make more frequent and complex inferences about their partners' thoughts and emotions? Is there evidence supporting the chilling effect, such that wives in aggressive relationships censor their communication more than wives in nonaggressive relationships? The chilling effect raises still another question. As less powerful members of society, do women across all types of couples censor their remarks more than their husbands?

Finally, and perhaps more importantly, the study will provide a semi-naturalistic description of spouses' on-line sense-making during conflict. The study will supply a topography of participants' reports of their own emotions, goals, and strategies, and their perceptions of their spouses' emotions, strategies, and thoughts. Furthermore, analysis of these cognitions will reveal which aspects of a discussion of marital conflict are more salient to aggressive and nonaggressive couples.

## Methods

### Participants

Participants were recruited and data gathered in Buffalo, New York, as part of a large scale experimental study titled the Marital Interaction Project (MIP). The participants comprised a heterogeneous, community-based sample. Couples were recruited from a large epidemiological sample of newlyweds and through newspaper advertisements. Each couple received from \$100 to \$150 for their participation, depending upon the length of time they were at the lab. Screening yielded couples in their first marriage, married from one to three years, who were not in treatment for marital problems. Also, couples were English-speaking, with husbands between 21 and 32 years of age. Since the MIP was designed to study alcohol and the interactions of physically aggressive and nonaggressive couples, husbands were selected who were moderate to heavy drinkers (minimum of three drinks per occasion at least twice per month), had not been treated for alcohol or drug problems, were not attempting to abstain from drinking and were not medically contraindicated for alcohol consumption. The final eligibility requirement, that participants meet criteria for either the aggressive or nonaggressive group, resulted in a sample of 139 couples for the MIP. Of those couples, one third received alcohol before their discussion as part of the experiment. The present study analyzes only those participants who were not in the experimental group and were not administered alcohol before interaction (N=96). Thus, my study compares thoughts and emotions of aggressive and nonaggressive couples, not the affects of alcohol on these couples. Due to equipment problems and the failure of some subjects to complete the video-assisted recall procedures, data from only 73 couples

were available for the current project. This final sample includes 31 aggressive and 42 nonaggressive couples.

Screening for the groups used an abbreviated version of the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1979). To be included in the aggressive group, the husband's behavior (by either husband's or wife's report) met one of three criteria: 1) two or more episodes of aggression since marriage, 2) one or more aggressive episodes since marriage that involved a "serious" aggressive act (slap or greater), 3) one or more aggressive episodes since marriage and a "serious" episode prior to marriage. The criterion for the nonaggressive group was that neither husband nor wife reported any physically aggressive act by husband toward wife. Additionally, couples' satisfaction was assessed using the Marital Adjustment Test (MAT) (Locke & Wallace, 1959).

#### MIP Procedures

After couples arrived at the institute by taxi, researchers described the project to the participants and oriented them to the lab. The participants received a breathalyzer screen, established a baseline blood pressure, and completed Marital Adjustment Tests (Locke & Wallace, 1959). Couples completed an Assessment of Current Disagreements (ACD) (Leonard & Roberts, 1996) and engaged in a five-minute warm-up interaction. Next, after selecting their second-highest rated area of disagreement from the ACD as a discussion topic, the couple engaged in a 15-minute baseline interaction, followed by a post-interaction questionnaire.

After the baseline interaction, the next step in the MIP was applying the experimental stimulus. One third of the husbands received alcohol, one third a placebo, and one third formed a control group that received no alcohol. Next the couples had a five-minute reunion interaction. For the 15-minute

experimental interaction that followed, couples discussed their highest rated disagreement from the ACD. Then, participants completed a post-interaction questionnaire and had their blood pressure measured to create a second baseline.

Finally, the spouses were separated and each participant independently provided video-assisted recall of their thoughts and feelings experienced during the experimental interaction. Each participant was shown a video recording of their partner with audio of both their own and their spouse's voice. Participants were asked to imagine going through the interaction again and to attempt to re-experience how they felt and what they were thinking. Since participants were not given instructions to attend to any specific aspect of the interaction, the recall data provide a semi-naturalistic account of their thoughts and emotions during conflict (Sillars, Dun, & Roberts, 1996, see Appendix A). The videotape was paused every 20 seconds for participants to recall their thoughts and feelings. Their recalled thoughts were audio-taped and later transcribed for coding. To summarize the MIP procedures, there are two factors in the experimental design: 1) aggressive/nonaggressive and 2) alcohol/placebo/control. Previous studies have analyzed the couples' interaction behaviors; the present study analyzes the recall data.

#### Data Analysis.

Transcripts of the recall data were unitized by the author and a team of four undergraduate coders. The data were divided into units primarily consisting of dependent clauses. The coding manual (Sillars et al., 1996), which is attached as Appendix A, provides a complete explanation of the unitizing as well as explaining codes and coding rules, and provides examples of the codes. Coders trained for three weeks with the unitizing rules. Reliability



of unitizing was assessed throughout the unitizing to monitor for drift and decay of coders. Total numbers of units created for entire transcripts were compared and yielded an average of 88% agreement. The total number of units generated for the recall data was 11269.

To code these units, a coding scheme was developed inductively from a sample of the recall data. Sillars and colleagues (1996) began the process of developing the coding system with a review of the relevant literature and generated categories by sorting and resorting the sample segments of recall data. Thus, the codes reflect both trends in the data and the important themes in the literature. The coding scheme was refined and finalized during a four-week training period.

The coding scheme was designed to reveal spouses' thoughts during a discussion of marital conflict. The coding system is particularly focused upon how couples plan, monitor and react to the discussion. The codes identify thoughts and feelings in three primary thematic domains, namely emotions, appraisals of the interaction, and reports of communicative strategies. A fourth domain, uncodables, includes several types of statements that are not related to the discussion. The thematic domains are divided into subcategories and specific codes. Please see Figure 1 for a summary of the thematic domains, subcategories, and codes. In addition to the thematic codes, statements in both the emotion and strategy domains are also assigned an actor code (self, partner, or dyad). The actor code identifies which spouse is perceived to feel an emotion or engage in a communication strategy. Also, all three primary domains are assigned a perspective code (direct or meta). The perspective code indicates which spouse's viewpoint is being reported. Thus, the statement, "He's not listening" would be included in the strategy domain

("withdrawal") , assigned an actor code, "partner", and given a perspective code of "direct". A meta-perspective applies when the thought is attributed to the partner, such as "She thinks I'm lying" and "He doesn't understand."

The recall data were coded by the same coding team that unitized them. Throughout the coding process, the coding team met weekly to assess intercoder reliability. These reliability assessments for the 51-code scheme included 1642 codes for 426 units. Percentage of agreement between coders varied from 62% to 85% during weekly reliability checks. Average agreement was 71%. This assessment of reliability is conservative in that it assesses individual codes, yet much of my analysis of thoughts occurs at a summary level, comparing groups of similar codes. For example, when comparing aggressive and nonaggressive couples, all constructive strategies were analyzed in sum, not individually.

Figure 1

## Condensed Listing of Thematic Codes

**EMOTION**

1. **Positive Emotions** -- happiness, relaxation, amusement, affection, love, and other pleasant emotional states.
2. **Dysphoria** -- sadness, unhappiness, apprehension, worry, depression, and similar emotions. This cluster of emotions is typically associated with subdued or withdrawn reactions.
3. **Anger and Frustration** -- being mad, angry, hot, irritated, frustrated, and so forth. This emotional cluster is associated with high arousal and is typically externally-directed.

**STRATEGY**

- **CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT**
  5. **Collaboration** -- working together, compromising, trying to help or solve conflicts in a collaborative manner, and other cooperative acts.
  6. **Information Sharing and Disclosure** -- talking directly, openly, and noncompetitively about issues.
  7. **Soliciting and Attending** -- soliciting the other person's disclosure, attentive listening, and probing for information.
- **AVOIDANCE AND DETACHMENT**
  8. **Withdrawal** -- aloofness, lack of caring, disinterest, and other states that reflect lack of involvement in the conversation; also limiting one's involvement in the conversation by not talking, not listening, etc..
  9. **Topic Shifting** -- changing the subject, bringing up irrelevant points, getting off track.
  10. **Stonewalling** -- denying the existence of a problem, making excuses, or denying one's role in a conflict.
  11. **Censorship** -- monitoring and controlling one's own communication in anticipation of negative or hostile reactions from the other person.
  12. **Lying and Insincerity** -- lies, insincere assurances.
  13. **Giving in** -- giving in to the other person. The language associated with examples generally implies that concessions are made grudgingly, not in a cooperative and voluntary spirit.
- **CONFRONTATION**
  14. **Dominating the Floor** -- limiting the opportunity for the partner to talk through interruption, long speeches, etc.
  15. **Assertion** -- assertively arguing one's position.
  16. **Inflexibility** -- refusal to yield or compromise, or blocking the other person's strategy.
  17. **Exaggeration and Distortion** -- exaggerating or distorting a point in the course of an argument.
  18. **Criticism and Verbal Aggression** -- personal criticism, blaming, personal attacks, yelling, swearing, etc..
  19. **Negative Voice and Appearance** -- negative tone of voice, facial expressions, and other nonverbal behavior.
  20. **Other Aversive Strategies** -- other negative communication strategies that are idiosyncratic to particular people, relationships, etc.
- **NEUTRAL AND MIXED STRATEGIES**
  21. **Initiation and Termination** -- trying to stimulate conversation; bringing the conversation to a close.
  22. **General Talk** -- neutral conversation and small talk.
  23. **Relationship Repair** -- attempting or wanting to soothe negative feelings and reduce hostile conflict.
  24. **Joking** -- making non hostile jokes, being silly or funny.

**APPRAISAL**• **ISSUE APPRAISAL**

24. **Elaboration** -- neutral analysis of relationship issues. Unlike the person appraisal codes, elaboration statements focus on impersonal aspects of the relationship, such as situational events and objective circumstances. Thus, elaboration statements do not implicitly criticize.
25. **Agreement** -- agreeing with the opinions or ideas of the other.
26. **Disagreement** -- disagreeing with the ideas or opinions of the other person or statements that refute or contradict the opinions or ideas of the other person.
28. **Solution** -- thoughts about solutions to problems.

• **PERSON APPRAISAL****Self**

29. **Neutral and Positive** -- neutral or positive evaluation of one's own traits, behaviors, or ideas.
30. **Negative** -- Self-criticism, admission, and accepting responsibility for problems alluded to in the discussion.
31. **Denial and Justification** -- denying, minimizing, justifying or excusing one's own role in conflicts.

**Partner**

32. **Neutral and Positive** -- neutral or positive evaluation of the partner's traits, behaviors, or ideas.
33. **Complaint** -- ongoing dissatisfactions with the other person. Direct complaints explicitly state the source of dissatisfaction. Indirect complaints elaborate on the rationale for direct complaints (stated or unstated).
34. **Hostile Attribution** -- criticizing the motives and intentions of the other person.

35. **Rejection** -- general negative regard for the partner and hostile reactions to the partner's opinions or behavior.

**Relationship**

36. **Positive and Neutral** -- neutral, positive, or optimistic evaluation of the relationship.
37. **Negative** -- pessimistic evaluations of the relationship.

• **PROCESS APPRAISAL**

38. **Understanding** -- statements that express understanding or a willingness to understand the partner, does not necessarily imply agreement. Meta perspectives are statements that attribute understanding to the partner.
39. **Not Understanding** -- statements that express a lack of understanding or confusion about the partner.
40. **Keeping Score** -- references to who is winning, losing, or expected to prevail in the discussion.
41. **Unexpected Behavior** -- the discussion is seen as unexpected or out of character (i.e., a violation of expectations).
42. **Repetitious Behavior** -- the discussion is described as repetitive and highly predictable.
43. **Foreboding** -- some aspect of discussion provokes negative anticipation.
44. **Resolution** -- Progress or resolution of problems is anticipated based on the discussion.
45. **Impasse** -- Lack of progress or resolution is experienced or is anticipated based on the discussion.
46. **Intoxication** -- statements about the husbands' current state of intoxication. This code does not apply to general discussions of drinking that do not refer to the immediate situation.

## Results

### Aggregated Cognitions

Before explicating differences between participants, I first examine the thematic content of thoughts and emotions for all couples (across aggressive and nonaggressive groups). The coding scheme generated a detailed view of the couples' thought lines during a discussion of marital conflict. Thoughts were coded into 4 main thematic domains and further divided into 51 different codes. The thematic domains are emotion, strategy, appraisal and uncodables. Please see Table 2 for an overview of the results by theme. This table includes the number of reports in each domain and the percentage of the total responses for each. The table illustrates that the bulk of thoughts during conflict focused on the thematic domains of appraisal and strategy. The appraisal domain accounted for over half of the responses, and one fourth of the responses fell in the strategy domain. The emotion domain comprised 8.5% of the total. Finally, 13.8% of the responses were coded as not relevant to either the discussion or the marital relationship.

Table 2

#### Number of Responses by Thematic Domain

<u>Domain</u>	<u>Number of Responses</u>	
	<u>N</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Emotion	956	8.5%
Strategy	2703	24.0%
Appraisal	6059	53.8%
Uncodable	1551	13.8%
Total	11269	100.0%

The domains were further divided into thematic codes (or subcategories).

The thoughts were evenly distributed across the different thematic subcategories with five codes exceeding 5% of codable responses and no subcategories exceeding 10%. Also, there were only eight codes with less than half a percent of the total codable responses. For a complete list of the thematic subcategories and the percentage of responses in each, refer to Appendix B. The following analyses of the thematic codes are based on the summed percentages of responses. The responses for each individual are divided by the total number of codable responses. The percentages are then averaged across the entire sample. This procedure weights each individual equally instead of emphasizing the more talkative participants. Note that the uncodable responses are not included in these totals. With 9718 codable recall statements, each percentage point represents approximately 100 thoughts and emotions.

### Emotion

The first thematic domain, emotion, contains three subcategories. Anger was the dominant subcategory with 5% of the total reports. Thus, approximately half (52%) of the emotions spouses reported during conflict were anger. The next most common emotion code was dysphoria. It comprised 2.5% of the total which is 26% of the emotion codes. The third emotion code, positive emotions, is the most diverse and inclusive. For example, this subcategory includes "I was happy," "cause I love him," and "feeling more relaxed." It is surprising that, with such breadth, positive emotions comprised a mere 2.1% of responses making it the least commonly reported emotion code. Thus, 22% of the responses in the emotion domain were positive.

Reports of emotions were also coded for actor (e.g., who is angry) and perspective (i.e. direct versus meta). The majority of emotion codes were direct perspectives (over 99%), but there was greater variation among actor codes. Table 3 reports emotion subcategories by actor (self and partner) for direct perspectives only. Because participants rarely reported that both spouses' were sharing an emotion (actor code "dyad"), they are not included on the table. Actor code dyad comprised less than .9% of the responses in this domain. Table 3 shows that participants' monitor their own emotional state more closely than their spouses' emotions. Actor code "self" comprised 83.3% of reported emotions and actor code "partner" was 15.7%. This difference is most stark for positive emotions where the ratio of self-to-partner codes was 7:1. Clearly spouses' own emotions are much more salient than perceptions of their partner's emotions.

Table 3

Percentage of Emotion Codes by Actor

	<u>Attributed to</u>		<u>Total</u>
	<u>Partner</u>	<u>Self</u>	
Anger	.8%	4.2%	5.0%
Dysphoria	.7%	1.9%	2.5%
Positive Emotions	.1%	2.0%	2.1%

Strategy

I expected spouses to pay particular attention to discussion strategies, both their own and their partner's. Conversational strategies were salient to participants, as 24% of codable responses fell in this thematic domain. Thus, strategy was the second largest domain. Each strategy was also coded for

Table 4

Strategy Codes by Actor

Theme	Attributed to			
	Partner		Self	
	% of Total	% of Strategy	% of Total	% of Strategy
Avoidance				
Withdrawal	2.5%	9.1%	1.6%	5.8%
Topic Shifting	1.2%	4.5%	.3%	1.2%
Stonewalling	1.1%	4.0%	.3%	1.0%
Censorship	.1%	.2%	.5%	1.6%
Lying and Insincerity	1.2%	4.4%	.1%	.3%
Giving In	.1%	.4%	.3%	1.1%
Confrontation				
Dominating the Floor	.3%	1.2%	.0%	.1%
Assertion	.8%	2.9%	1.7%	6.3%
Inflexibility	.7%	2.5%	.3%	1.1%
Exaggeration and Distortion	.5%	1.7%	.0%	.1%
Criticism and Verbal Aggression	1.5%	5.3%	.3%	1.2%
Negative Nonverbal	.6%	2.3%	.1%	.3%
Other Aversive	.5%	1.9%	.4%	1.4%
Constructive				
Collaboration	.4%	1.4%	.8%	2.9%
Information Sharing	.4%	1.3%	1.7%	6.2%
Soliciting and Attending	.3%	1.2%	1.4%	5.2%
Neutral and Mixed				
Initiation and Termination	.0%	.1%	1.1%	3.9%
General Talk	.7%	2.7%		
Relationship Repair	.1%	.3%	.5%	1.7%
Joking	.5%	1.9%	.7%	2.6%

actor and perspective. There were few reports of strategy from a meta perspective (.2%). However, the actor code varied widely. Table 4 lists all 20 strategy themes divided by self and partner actor codes. Actor code "dyad" is not reported in Table 4 because of the small number (1.8%) of "dyad" codes. The table reports both total percentage (of codable thoughts) and percentage of

codes within the strategy domain. The strategy codes are organized into four subdomains. These subdomains are (from most to least-reported) avoidance and detachment (10.2% of total codable responses), confrontation (8.0%), constructive engagement (5.6%), and neutral and mixed strategies (3.9%).

Avoidance and detachment. Of all the strategies, the most frequently reported was withdrawal, accounting for 4.2% of all codable responses. Withdrawal is the most general avoidance and detachment code. Therefore, it includes a variety of thoughts about the conversation. For example, "He's not listening," "She doesn't care," and "I'm tired," are all coded as withdrawal. The other five avoidance codes identify specific behaviors. Topic shifting was the most commonly reported of these behaviors, accounting for 2.2% of the recalled thoughts. Next, stonewalling (which was dominated by excuses) comprised 1.4% of responses. The fourth most commonly reported avoidance strategy was lying and insincerity at 1.3%, and the least common codes were censorship (.5%) and giving in (.4%).

As the most frequently reported cluster of strategies, avoidance is a salient theme during marital conflict. Furthermore, analysis of the actor code reveals that participants noted their partner's avoidance strategies more often than their own. 61% of reports of avoidance behavior were ascribed to the partner, 31% to self and 8% to both members. This percentage varied among the thematic codes. 58% and 56% of withdrawal and topic shifting were partner respectively. However, spouses attributed 94% of lying and insincerity to their partner. Clearly, the participants diligently monitored their partner's avoidance strategies. Also of note, topic shifting was the thematic code most likely to be assigned an actor code "dyad". Even though only 1.8% of the strategies were attributed to the dyad, 28% of topic shifting codes were references to the dyad.



Thus, topic shifting was often seen as a function of both spouses, not one individual.

Confrontation. The second largest area of the strategy domain, confrontation, is comprised of seven codes. "Assertion" and "criticism and verbal aggression" were the two dominant codes in this cluster. Each received 2.5% and 1.8% of the total codable reports respectively. Assertion is the most general thematic code for perceived confrontive behavior and is exemplified by the statement "trying to get my point across." Criticism and verbal aggression, a starkly negative code, describes statements such as "I thought he was picking on me personally." It is interesting that each of the other five confrontation codes comprised only 3.5% of the total.

The difference between reports of partners' and participants' own confrontive strategies was similar to that for avoidance strategies. Participants reported that their partners engaged in 61% of the confrontive behavior whereas 38% of confrontive strategies were ascribed to actor code self (1% for actor code dyad). While participants paid more attention to their partner's confrontive behavior, they also noted when they were making their voice heard. Overall, the results indicate that confrontive strategies were slightly less salient than avoidance strategies.

Constructive engagement. The three subcategories in the constructive engagement subdomain totaled 17.6% of the strategy codes. This cluster of codes contains all perceptions of positive conflict management behaviors and is the third most reported area in the strategy domain. The codes in this cluster, "information sharing", "soliciting and attending", and "collaboration", comprised 2.2%, 1.8% and 1.7% of valid responses, respectively. Information sharing, the most common constructive engagement theme, includes statements like, "oh,

I'm trying to tell her uh, feelings about her daughter's feeling moments I did."

These items are distinguishable from assertion, the most monitored confrontive strategy above, by their lack of competition and confrontation.

Not surprisingly, collaboration had a relatively high number of actor codes assigned to the dyad. 25% of all dyad codes were for collaboration. This thematic code would contain responses such as "we're compromising." Table 4 includes the responses for these strategies divided by self and partner actor codes. Note that most of the responses were coded self, unlike the avoidance and confrontation codes.

Mixed and neutral strategies. The least reported area of the strategy domain were the mixed and neutral strategies. Joking was the most reported strategy in this section with 1.4% of the total. Of the variety of different statements in this category, two stand out. In one case, participants simply reported the behavior. An example is, "I remember thinking he was being kind of silly." In other cases, spouses had a specific goal. For example, "I was thinking I had slowed her down a little bit with jokes, trying joking with her." Participants used humor to avoid an issue and to reduce tension. Other attempts to reduce hostile conflict were coded as relationship repair, the least frequently reported thematic code (.6%).

Analysis of the summed recalled thoughts and emotions from all participants provides a general description of the salience of different behaviors and emotions during conflict. First, spouses give substantial attention to their partner's withdrawal and avoidance behaviors. Also, they pay more attention to their own emotions than their partner's emotions, anger being the most salient. Spouses also monitored certain confrontive strategies and several collaborative

strategies. In addition to monitoring strategies and emotions, spouses make a variety of other appraisals.

Table 5.

Responses in Appraisal Domain

<u>Theme</u>	<u>% of Total</u>	<u>% of Appraisal</u>
Issue		
Elaboration	9.1%	14.5%
Agreement	3.1%	4.9%
Disagreement	8.4%	13.3%
Solution	1.3%	2.1%
Person		
Neutral and Positive (Self)	4.6%	7.4%
Admission	2.1%	3.4%
Denial and Justification	2.7%	4.3%
Neutral and Positive (Partner)	4.8%	7.7%
Complaint	8.2%	13.2%
Hostile Attribution	2.0%	3.1%
Rejection	3.2%	5.1%
Neutral and Positive (Relationship)	7%	1.0%
Negative (Relationship)	4%	4%
Process		
Understanding	1.0%	1.6%
Not Understanding	1.4%	2.2%
Keeping Score	4%	6%
Unexpected Behavior	3%	4%
Repetitious Behavior	1.3%	2.0%
Foreboding	4%	7%
Resolution	1.0%	1.6%
Impasse	1.5%	2.4%
Intoxication	8%	1.2%
Total	58.3%	93.2%

Appraisal

The coding scheme identifies as appraisals all thoughts that are not tied to communication behaviors, but are related to the discussion, the relationship, or the members. This thematic domain was the largest with 63% of codable

responses. Because these statements do not always refer to the actions or emotions of one of the spouses, they were not assigned an actor code. Meta perspectives were more common for appraisals than emotions and strategies. Even so, only 6.8% of responses in this domain were meta perspectives. Table 5 lists the thematic codes in the appraisal domain and the percent of total responses and percent of appraisals for direct perspectives. The 22 appraisal themes are organized into three subsections. These subsections are issue appraisal, person appraisal and process appraisal.

Issue appraisal. Together, the four codes in the issue appraisal subdomain measure the salience of the topic discussed. With 22.8 % of all responses, these four codes comprise the second-largest subsection of appraisals. The first code, elaboration, with 9.1% of total responses, contains neutral thoughts about the issue or the conflict. It is the most commonly reported of all 45 thematic codes. The second most common code in the scheme, disagreement, comprised 8.4% of responses. Disagreement included both counter arguments to the partners' ideas or position as well statements such as "that's wrong," and "and I don't agree with what he sayin." On the other hand, participants noted agreement with their partner in 3.1% of their responses.

Person appraisal. The most reported subsection of the appraisal domain, person appraisal, is further subdivided into three areas. These areas are self, partner, and relationship appraisal. (Note that this distinction performs the same function as the actor code, which was not assigned to appraisal codes.) Self-appraisal codes totaled 9.9% of responses, the same percentage as the emotion domain. There are three self-appraisal codes, namely "neutral and positive", "denial and justification", and "admission." The most common

response in this section, neutral and positive, had 4.6% of all responses. It is a broad thematic code, which included responses ranging from "I'm a morning person," to "I was thinking that...how I've improved." Admission, which encompassed all negative self-appraisals, was the least mentioned thematic code with 2.1% of responses. However, an additional .5% of responses were meta-perspective admission codes. This combination of codes would describe statements such as "he thinks it's my fault." Such meta-perspectives can be confusing; Appendix A contains more examples of them.

Partner appraisals totaled 17.8% of responses. Many of these responses were in the complaint subcategory which was the third most commonly reported code with 8.2% of the total. The next most common thematic code, positive and neutral, comprised 4.8% of responses. The final two codes are the most negative partner assessments. Rejection, with 3.2% of responses, included hostile reactions to the partner, or the partner's opinions and behaviors. Hostile attributions comprised 2% of responses. Lastly, relationship appraisals were not common, totaling only .9% of responses for the combination of both neutral/positive and negative relationship appraisals.

Process appraisal. The third subsection of the appraisal thematic domain is process appraisal. This subdomain consists of nine thematic codes that pertain to the discussion itself or the expected outcome of the discussion. Process appraisal comprised 10.9% of codable responses, making it the least reported subsection of the appraisal domain. The twin codes "understanding" and "not understanding" dominated the process appraisal subdomain. More important, these two codes share 60% of the meta perspectives. Meta-perspectives of understanding and not understanding indicate that the partner does or does not understand. Table 6 shows the responses for these codes

divided by perspective and the total of both direct and meta perspectives. Note that there are proportionally more meta-perspectives for not understanding than for understanding.

Table 6

Percentage of Responses for Understanding and Not Understanding by Perspective.

Code	Perspective		Total
	Direct	Meta	
Understanding	1.0%	1.0%	2.0%
Not Understanding	1.4%	1.9%	3.3%

The next two most common thematic codes are pessimistic appraisals of the interaction. "Impasse" comprised 1.5% and "repetitious behavior" was 1.3% of responses. While impasse indicates that the couple cannot solve their conflict, the repetitious behavior code applies when spouses' indicate that the discussion has happened before. This subcategory is typified by the response "this is the same old thing..." Resolution was the next most common thematic code with 1% of responses. This code is the opposite of impasse. Intoxication, with .8% of responses, was included because one third of the sample (which was omitted from this analysis) receive alcohol before the marital discussion. Another third (analyzed in the present study) received a placebo before interaction.

Uncodables

The final domain in the coding scheme is uncodables. These responses did not relate to the discussion, the couple, nor their relationship. The 1551

uncodable responses were split among 7 subcategories which are presented in Table 7.

The preceding analysis of spouses' thoughts and emotions during conflict shows that the majority of codes focused upon the appraisal domain. Person appraisals were particularly salient. On the other hand, the emotions experienced during conflict were substantially less prominent. Continued analysis of participants thought lines focuses upon differences between aggressive and nonaggressive couples and between husbands and wives.

Table 7

Uncodable Responses.

Subcategory	% of Uncodables
Other People	7.2%
Can't Remember and Don't Know	49.7%
Thinking Same as What Was Said	3.3%
Not Thinking Anything	4.0%
No Response	15.9%
Unclear and Unintelligible	2.4%
Off Topic	17.5%

Group Differences

Analyses of covariance were conducted for several individual thematic codes and clusters of thematic codes. The ANCOVAs, which measured the effect of group (aggressive or nonaggressive) and gender, controlled for the effect of both husbands' and wives' marital adjustment. Without controlling for the effects of adjustment, group differences might be explained as a function of

marital adjustment. T-tests were conducted on marital adjustment by group which showed that wives' and husbands' adjustment did vary with group membership. Specifically, wives in the nonaggressive group ( $M=124.7$ ) had higher adjustment than wives in the aggressive group ( $M=107.3$ ;  $t=3.6$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Likewise, husbands in the nonaggressive group ( $M=125.0$ ) had higher adjustment than nonaggressive husbands ( $M=104.2$ ;  $t=4.8$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Use of marital adjustment as a covariate elucidates the effect of group membership upon thoughts during conflict independent of the relationship between aggression and satisfaction. Thus, my analysis generates a clearer picture of group differences and the effects of satisfaction on intimate conflict.

Although the detail of the coding scheme provided the fine-grained picture of thoughts and emotions experienced during conflict, only a fraction of the 179 possible combinations of theme, actor and perspective codes were analyzed individually. Many thematic codes were collapsed into clusters and general indices for the analyses of covariance. For example, meta-perspectives, which were rarely identified, are only examined in sum (across all themes) and for two subcategories, namely understanding and not understanding. A total of 38 ANCOVAs were conducted. The dependent variables were aggregated percentages of various codes and clusters of codes.

### Emotion.

The emotion domain was expected to distinguish between aggressive and nonaggressive couples. Analyses of covariance were conducted on each emotion subcategory. Surprisingly, comparisons of means between these groups found few significant differences. A main effect for perception of partner dysphoria approached significance,  $F(1,69)=3.6$ ,  $p<.06$ . This finding suggests that aggressive couples ( $M=.88\%$ ) perceived more dysphoria in their spouse



than did nonaggressive couples ( $M=.48\%$ ). Both wives' and husbands' marital adjustment predicted the perception of partner's anger, ( $\beta=-.49$ ),  $p<.001$  for the association between wives' adjustment and perceived partner anger and ( $\beta=.31$ ),  $p<.05$  for the association between husbands' adjustment and perceived partner anger. Strangely, these effects were in opposite directions. Although adjustment varied with reports of partner anger, there was no main effect for aggressive versus nonaggressive group. In fact, the difference between the means, when controlled for marital adjustment, was zero. Further, there were no significant differences between aggressive and nonaggressive couples in monitoring of their own emotions (anger, dysphoria, and positive emotions). In addition, self-identified emotions did not significantly differ between husbands and wives.

#### Strategy.

Avoidance. ANCOVAs were performed on several indices of perceived discussion strategies. Reports of avoidance differed significantly between the aggressive and nonaggressive groups. Three measures of thoughts about avoidance behaviors were analyzed. Avoidance-self included withdrawal, topic shifting, stonewalling, giving in, and lying (for actor code "self"). Avoidance-partner included partner perceptions of these same behaviors except "lying and insincerity", which was analyzed separately. Significant group effects were found for avoidance-partner  $F(1,69)=4.4$ ,  $p<.05$ , and group effects were nearly significant for avoidance-self  $F(1,69)=3.7$ ,  $p<.06$ . Aggressive couples were more likely to perceive partner avoidance ( $M=6.3\%$ ) than nonaggressive couples ( $M=4.0\%$ ). Conversely, the results suggest that aggressive couples were less likely to identify avoidance-self ( $M=2.4\%$ ) than nonaggressive couples ( $M=3.5\%$ ). Furthermore, there was a significant gender effect,

$F(1,71)=24.9, p<.001$ , for perceptions of partner avoidance, such that wives ( $M=7.3\%$ ) perceived more avoidance-partner than their husbands ( $M=2.6\%$ ). A gender effect for partner "lying and insincerity-partner" approached significance  $F(71,1)=3.5, p<.07$ , suggesting that wives perceived more ( $M=1.7\%$ ) than husbands ( $M=.7\%$ ). Also, husbands' adjustment was significantly related to partner-lying ( $\beta=-.34, p<.05$ ), indicating that more frequent perceptions of partner-lying were present in less-adjusted husbands.

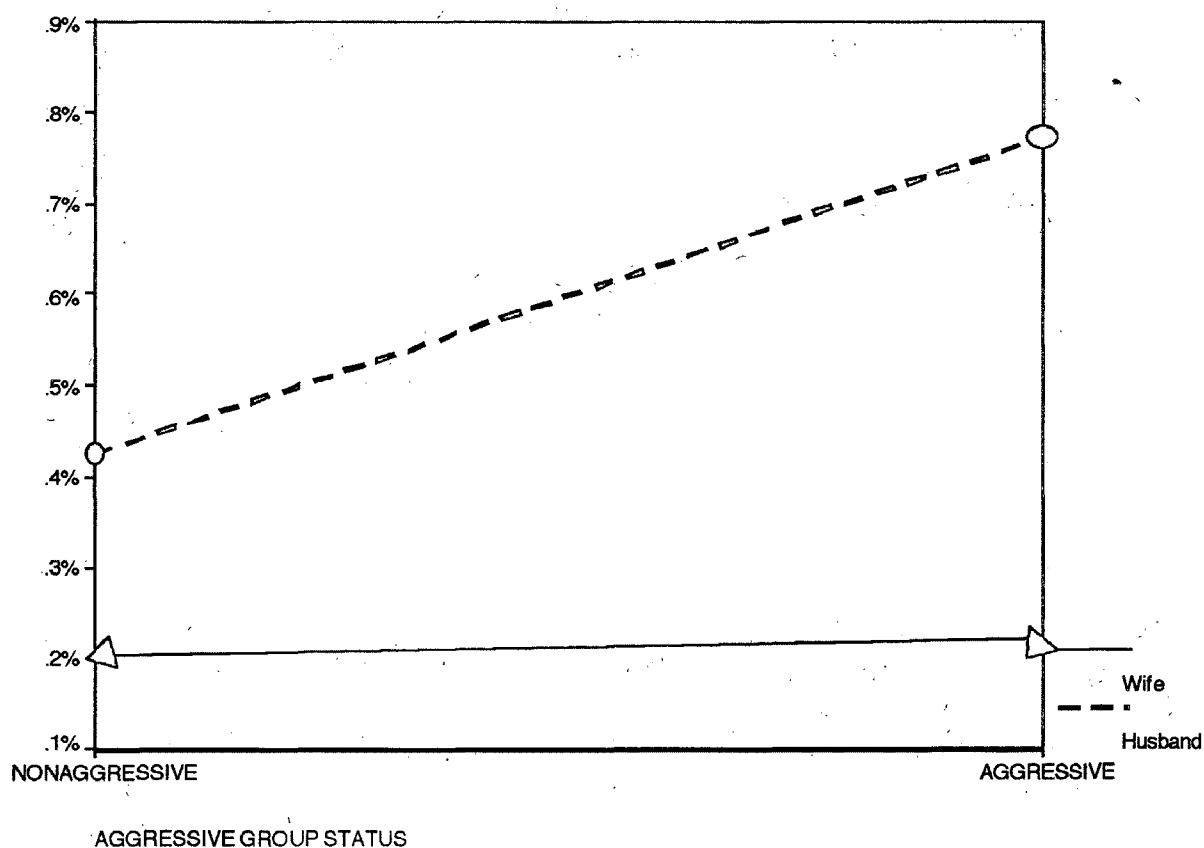
Confrontation. Whereas all three measures of avoidance strategies yielded positive findings, variations in thoughts about confrontive behavior were not significantly affected by group membership. The first measure, confrontation-self, was the sum of all confrontation codes except assertion. Thus, it included dominating the floor, inflexibility, exaggeration and distortion, criticism and verbal aggression, negative nonverbal, and other aversive. The second measure, confrontation-partner, was also a composite. It was comprised of the sum of all confrontation strategy themes with an actor code of partner. Finally, assertion-self, which was the most common confrontation strategy for participants' own behavior, was analyzed independently. No significant effects were present for assertion-self. Significant main effects for gender were present for both confrontation-self  $F(1,71)=9.0, p<.01$ , and confrontation-partner  $F(1,71)=4.6, p<.05$ . Wives' mean for the composite measure of confrontation-self ( $M=1.7\%$ ) was greater than husbands' ( $M=.7\%$ ). Interestingly, wives also perceived more confrontive partner behavior ( $M=5.7\%$ ) than husbands ( $M=4.1\%$ ). Finally, the relationship between confrontation-partner and marital adjustment was significant for wives ( $\beta=-.37, p<.01$ ). Thus, more frequent perceptions of husband confrontation was associated with lower adjustment for wives. In sum, monitoring of confrontive strategies clearly varied

by gender, but it did not vary significantly between aggressive and nonaggressive marriages.

Constructive engagement. The three constructive strategies were summed into two measures, one for constructive-self and one for perceived partner constructive behavior. Thus, each composite measure included collaboration, information sharing, and "soliciting and attending", with one for actor code "self" and the other for actor code "partner". A significant main effect of group was present for constructive engagement-self,  $F(1,69)=5.0$ ,  $p<.05$ , such that the aggressive group identified more than the nonaggressive group

Figure 2.

Effects of Group and Gender  
on Constructive Engagement-Self



There was also a significant effect of gender for these strategies  $F(1,71)=16.8$ ,  $p<.001$  (husbands more than wives). However, these main effects are qualified by an interaction between gender and group that approached significance  $F(1,71)=3.0$ ,  $p<.09$ . This interaction, which is graphed in Figure 2, suggests an observer bias for aggressive husbands. Although no group effects emerged for constructive engagement-partner, there was a main effect of gender  $F(1,71)=7.8$ ,  $p<.01$ . Wives ( $M=1.6\%$ ) noted more constructive partner behavior than husbands ( $M=.6\%$ ). Also, the relationship of constructive engagement-partner to wife's adjustment approached significance ( $\beta=.25$ ,  $p<.09$ ), suggesting that wives' perception of constructive strategy use by her husband is more likely for better adjusted wives.

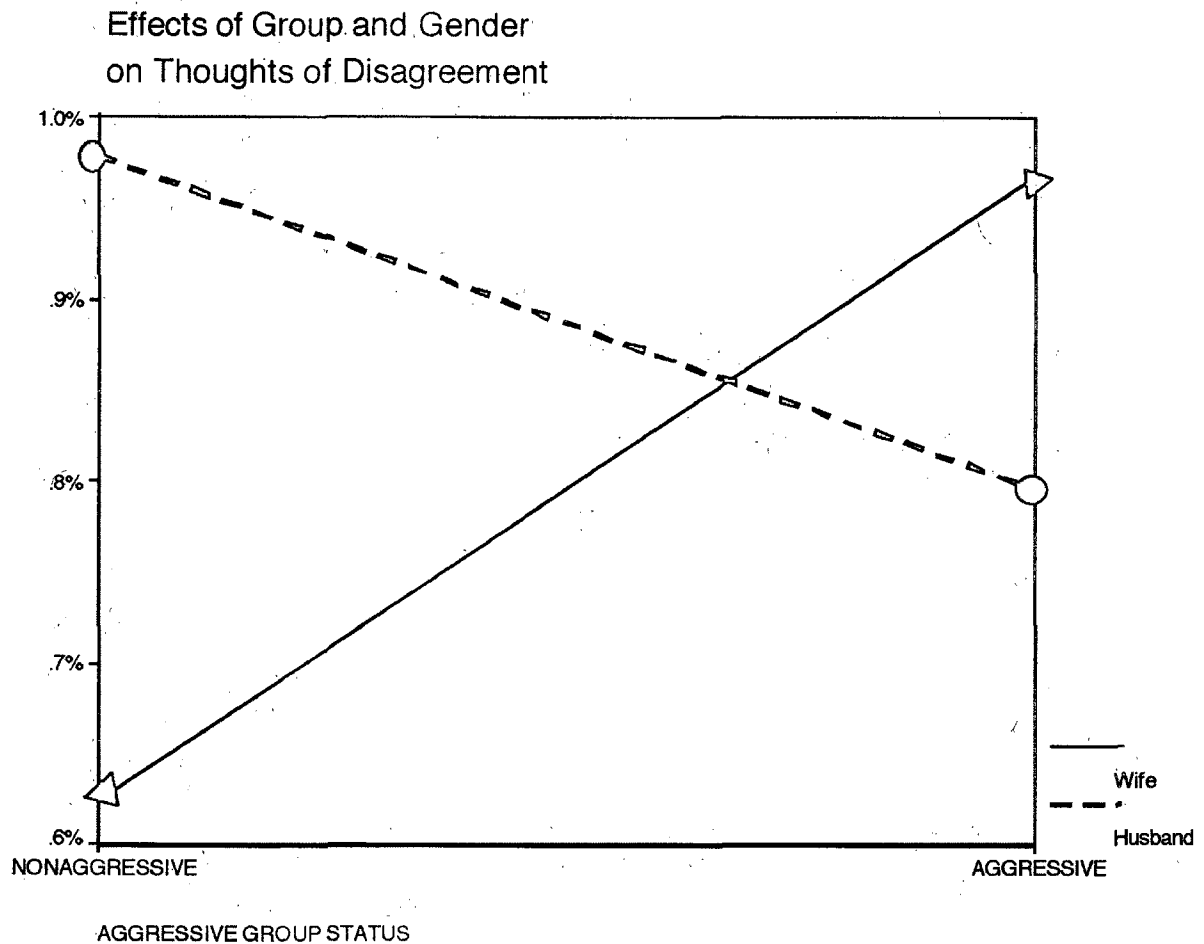
Neutral and mixed. Joking was the final measure analyzed in the strategy domain. Since the category was infrequent, joking attributed to self, partner and the dyad was combined into a single measure.. Although there were no main effects for this measure, the relationship between husbands' perception of joking and marital adjustment approached significance ( $\beta=-.27$ ,  $p<.9$ ). This relationship may indicate that dissatisfied husbands identify more joking than well-adjusted husbands.

In sum, the 2703 thoughts about communication strategies clearly varied between aggressive and nonaggressive dyads. Even stronger differences existed in the way that wives and husbands monitor communication strategies.

### Appraisal

With 63% of spouses' thoughts and emotions, the appraisal domain contained the largest amount of data. Therefore, more analyses in this domain were made for individual thematic codes than in the other two domains. When analyzed individually, there was only one significant main effect for aggressive

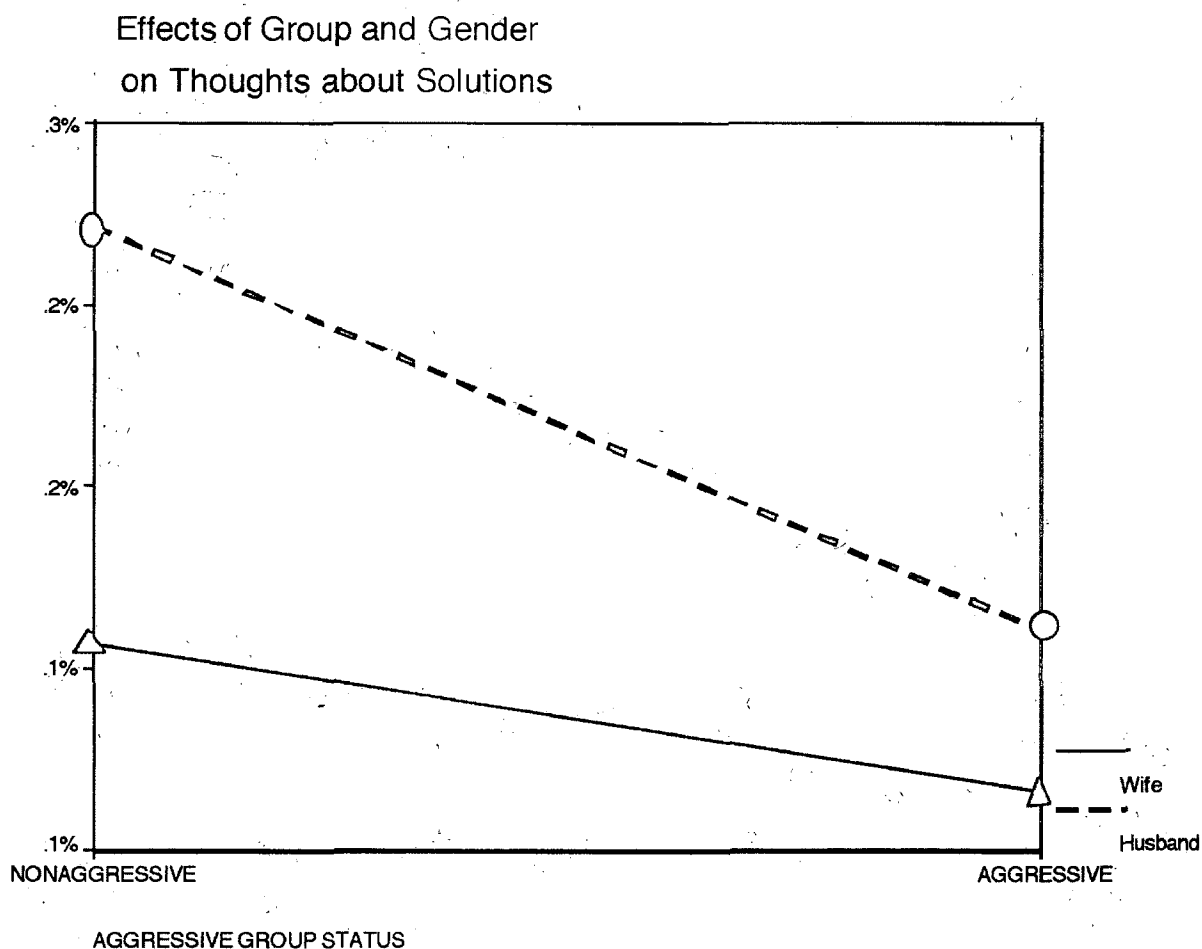
Figure 3.



and nonaggressive group. However, there were several significant main effects present for gender as well as interactions between group and gender.

Issue appraisal. ANCOVAs were conducted for each of the four subcategories of issue appraisal and for the sum of these themes. These results provide valuable information. There was a significant main effect for group on agreement,  $F(1,69)=4.0$ ,  $p<.05$ , such that aggressive couples ( $M=1.9\%$ ) had fewer thoughts of agreement with their partner during the discussion than the nonaggressive couples ( $M=3.9\%$ ). There was a similar main effect for gender  $F(1,71)=10.2$ ,  $p<.01$ . Wives ( $M=2.1\%$ ) had fewer thoughts of agreement than husbands ( $M=4.0\%$ ). There was also a significant

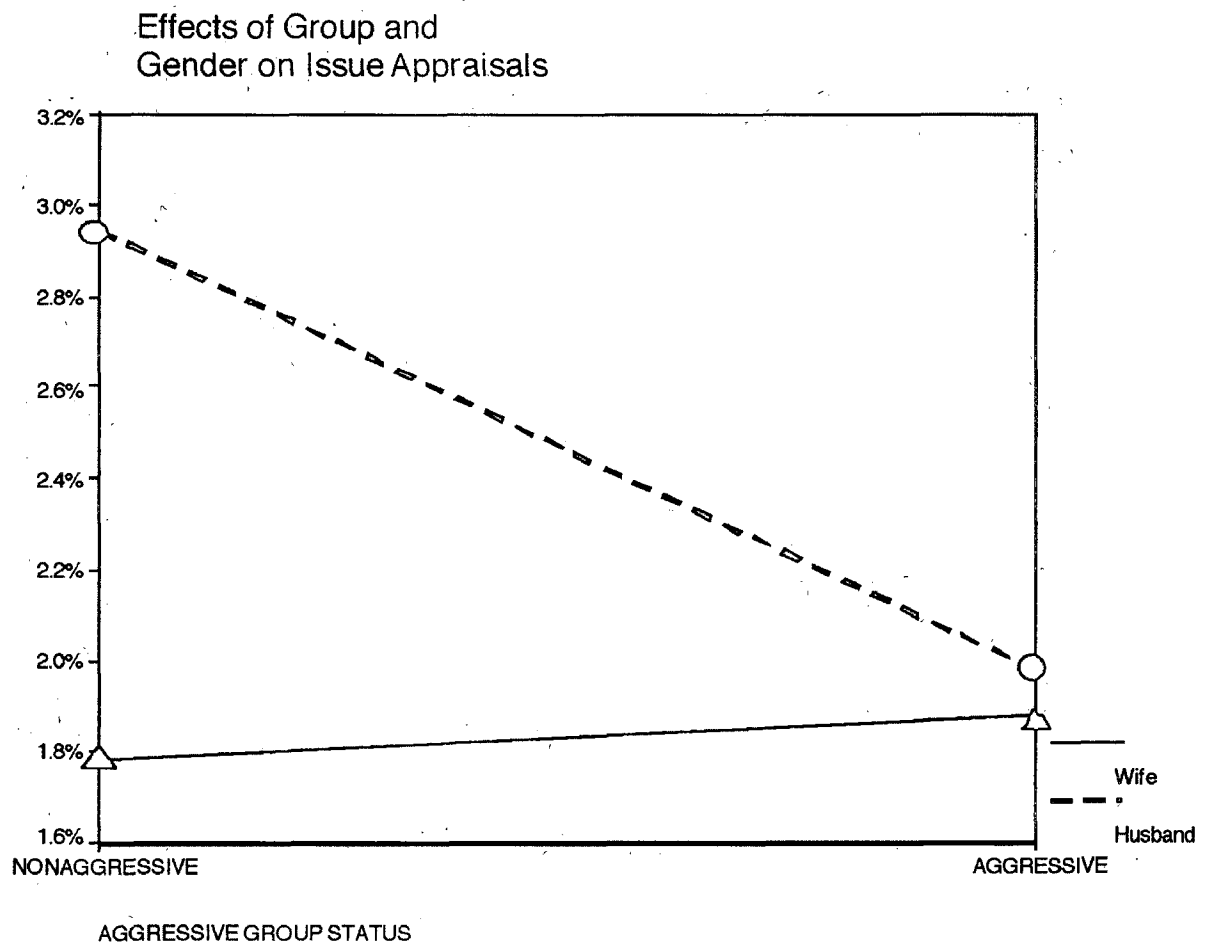
main effect for gender for neutral elaboration,  $F(1,71)=4.5$ ,  $p<.05$ . Husbands ( $M=10.6\%$ ) had more of these thoughts than wives ( $M=7.5\%$ ). Interaction effects were present for disagreement  $F(1,71)=3.7$ ,  $p<.06$  and solution  $F(1,71)=5.5$ ,  $p<.05$ . Physically aggressive husbands were less likely to think about solutions than nonaggressive husbands whereas wives thoughts about solutions were less affected by group. The interaction for disagreement was similar for husbands, physically aggressive husbands had fewer thoughts of disagreement than nonaggressive husbands. However, wives in the aggressive group were more likely to identify disagreement. These interactions are represented in figures 3 and 4, respectively. It should be noted that the interaction effect on Figure 4.



disagreement was nearly significant and that the total reports for solution totaled a mere 1.4% of codable thoughts and emotions. The tentative results for these two individual thematic codes gain support from the composite measure of issue appraisal. A main effect of gender for issue appraisal,  $F(1,71)=9.0$ ,  $p<.01$  was qualified by an interaction effect  $F(1,71)=6.4$ ,  $p<.05$ . Figure 5 shows the relationship between group (aggressive vs. nonaggressive) and gender for issue appraisal. Clearly, aggressive husbands give less attention to the conflict issue than nonaggressive husbands.

Person appraisal. I analyzed each of the seven person-appraisal themes. These subcategories of thoughts about self and partner did not differ

Figure 5



based on group membership. However, gender had a significant effect on both the rejection,  $F(1,71)=7.7$ ,  $p<01$ , and admission,  $F(1,71)=5.9$ ,  $p<05$ , themes. Wives more frequently had hostile, negative thoughts about their spouse (wives'  $M=4.3\%$ , husbands'  $M=2.1\%$ ), and husbands ( $M=2.8\%$ ) more frequently admitted responsibility for problems in the relationship than wives ( $M=1.4\%$ ). Furthermore, gender effects for "neutral and positive, self,"  $F(1,71)=3.5$ ,  $p<.07$ , and "neutral and positive, partner,"  $F(1,71)=3.4$ ,  $p<.08$ , approached significance. These findings suggest that husbands had more neutral and positive thoughts about self ( $M=5.3\%$ ) than wives ( $M=3.9\%$ ), whereas wives ( $M=5.7\%$ ) had more frequent neutral and positive thoughts about their partner than husbands ( $M=3.9\%$ ). Also, rejection of partner was significantly and negatively related to wife's adjustment ( $\beta=-.42$ ,  $p<.01$ ). I also analyzed a composite measure for all seven of person appraisal codes. There were no effects present for this summary measure. However, a general index to gauge spouses' attention to self versus partner was effected by gender  $F(1,71)=34.5$ ,  $p<.001$ . This composite measure included the sum of all self appraisal, all strategy and emotion themes for self *minus* the sum of all partner appraisals, all partner-perceived strategies, and all partner-perceived emotions. Wives had more thoughts about their partner ( $M=-14.2\%$ ), and husbands thought more frequently about self ( $M=9.9\%$ ). It is worth noting that the difference on this scale is 24%.

Process appraisal. The final subdomain analyzed was process appraisal. Separate analyses were conducted for direct and meta perspectives of both "understanding" and "not understanding." As noted previously these two codes accounted for 60% of meta-perspectives. There were no main effects for aggressive and nonaggressive group for these four codes. A significant main



effect of gender emerged for “not understanding--meta”,  $F(1,71)=14.5$ ,  $p<.001$ , such that wives ( $M=2.8\%$ ) identified more “not understanding” from a meta-perspective (i.e., a lack of understanding was attributed to the spouse) than husbands ( $M=.9\%$ ). There were no effects for “not understanding” from a direct perspective or for “understanding” (meta and direct perspectives) and “resolution”. There was a significant effect of group (aggressive vs. nonaggressive) for a composite measure of pessimistic process appraisals,  $F(1,69)=5.7$ ,  $p<.05$ . This measure, which included the sum of repetitious behavior, foreboding, and impasse, did not have the expected effect of group. It indicated that nonaggressive couples ( $M=3.4\%$ ) more frequently had pessimistic thoughts about the discussion than aggressive couples ( $M=2.9\%$ ). Less surprisingly, pessimistic thoughts were also related to wives’ adjustment ( $\beta=-.28$ ,  $p<.05$ ) and was possibly related to husbands’ ( $\beta=-.24$ ,  $p<.1$ ) adjustment. My analysis of process appraisal included a second summary measure which included all process appraisal themes except intoxication. There was a significant main effect of group  $F(1,69)=4.0$ ,  $p<.05$ , such that nonaggressive couples ( $M=7.6\%$ ) reported more process appraisal themes than aggressive couples ( $M=6.7\%$ ).

Finally, three broad measures were analyzed. Self versus partner focus was explained above. The other two multi-domain measures were (a) mutual focus, which included all actor code “dyad” thoughts and emotions plus relationship appraisals, and (b) meta focus, which was the sum of all meta perspectives. Main effects of gender were present for these two measures. Mutual focus,  $F(1,71)=34.5$ ,  $p<.001$ , was less commonly reported by wives ( $M=2.6\%$ ) than husbands ( $M=3.0\%$ ). On the other hand, meta perspectives,  $F(1,71)=23.1$ ,  $p<.001$ , were more commonly reported by wives ( $M=6.3\%$ ) than

husbands ( $M=3.3\%$ ). Most meta perspectives were “understanding” and “not understanding” themes.

### Summary

When controlling for marital satisfaction, I found seven differences between aggressive and nonaggressive marital dyads. The variance between these groups reflects different thought lines during discussion of marital conflict. Figure 6 presents a graphical summary of the differences. In monitoring communication strategies, the aggressive couples perceive more avoidance-partner, less avoidance-self, and less constructive engagement-self. Furthermore, aggressive couples identify fewer thoughts of agreement, focus less on the process of the discussion, are less pessimistic, but notice more partner dysphoria than nonaggressive couples.

There was a considerable divergence between the thought lines of wives and husbands during conflict. Two of these were qualified by interaction effects with group. The remaining sixteen measures are shown in Figure 7, ranked from greatest to smallest difference. Note that the scale for this graph does not show the wives' mean for Self versus Partner Focus because the mean is negative 14.3%.

## Main Effects of Aggressive versus Nonaggressive Group

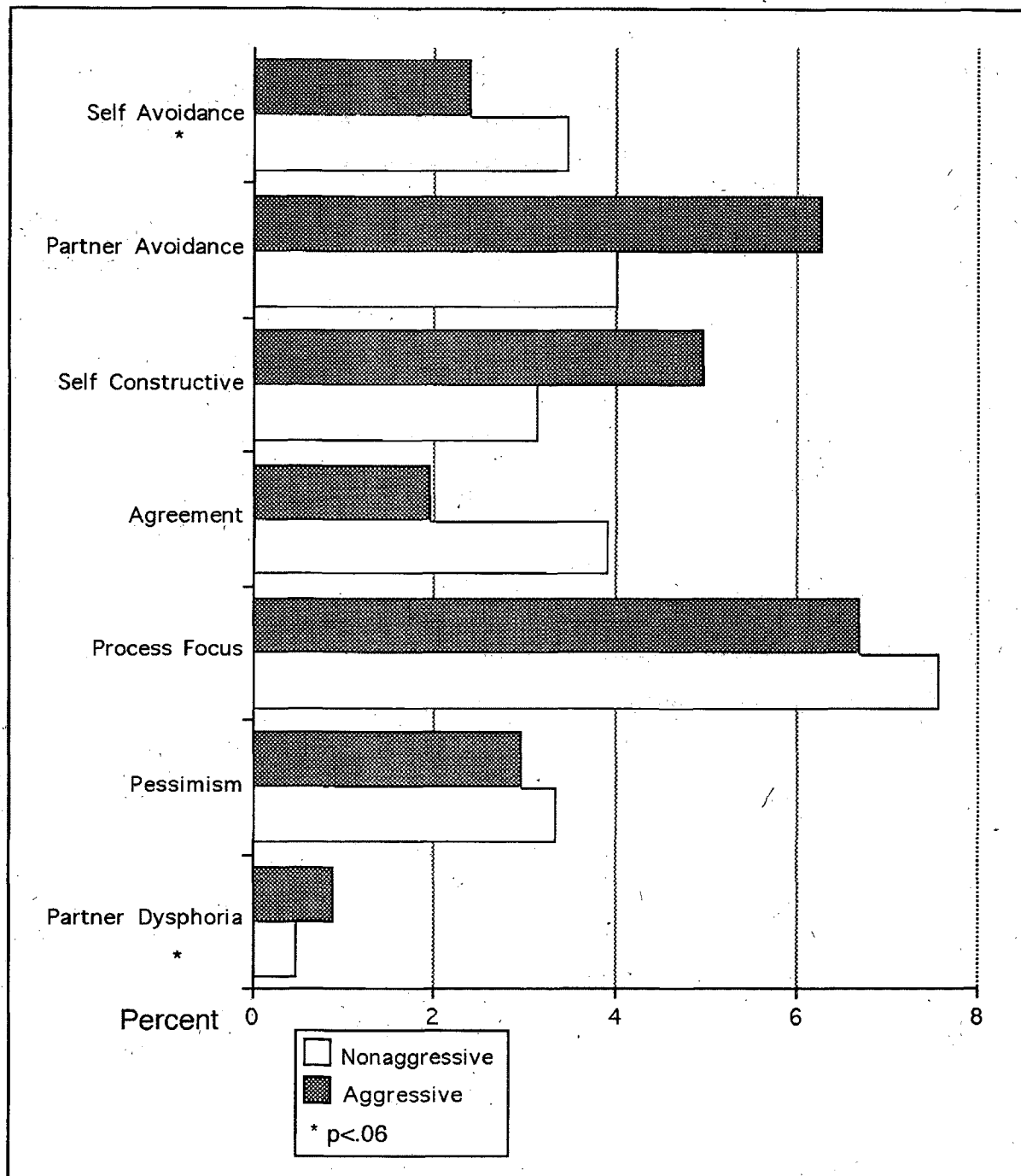


Figure 6

## Main Effects of Gender

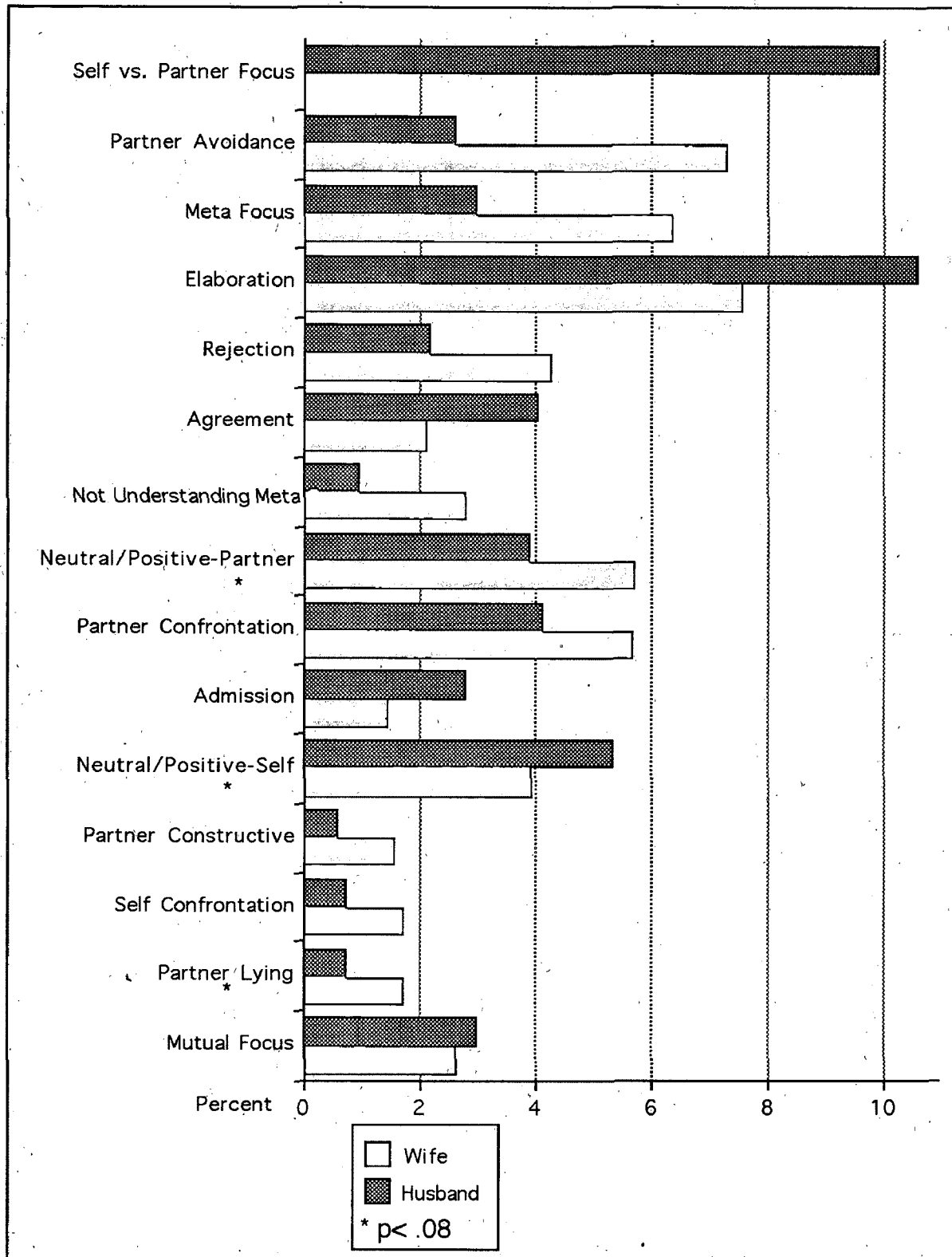


Figure 7

## Discussion

Cognition and communication are linked, not through a simple cause and effect, but in a complex, reciprocal relationship. I constructed a broad topography of thoughts and emotions experienced during conflict to better see these connections. The terrain for members of physically aggressive relationships diverged from that of nonaggressive couples. The way physically aggressive husbands monitored communication strategies was remarkable. Aggressive husbands had a self-serving bias such that they perceived themselves as collaborative communicators and viewed their wives as detached and avoiding. Nonaggressive husbands focused more upon the content of the discussion than the aggressive husbands, a pattern that may indicate a problem solving approach to marital conflict for nonaggressive husbands. Also, nonaggressive couples were more likely to monitor the process of the discussion than were the aggressive dyads. However, the reports of emotion for aggressive and nonaggressive couples were similar.

Marital adjustment did not account for as much variance of thoughts during conflict as expected. Although the majority of the associations between marital adjustment and thoughts during conflict were as expected, other expected findings were absent. On the other hand, my topography of thoughts shows many differences between husbands and wives. Most noteworthy, wives were partner-focused, while husbands were self-focused. Also, wives monitored avoidance more closely than did husbands. Finally, several general trends deserve attention, and I will highlight these before comparing the thought lines of husbands and wives in aggressive and nonaggressive marriages.

### Topography of Thoughts

Couples rarely reported their emotional state; less than 10% of their recalled thoughts and emotions were emotions. The scarcity of emotions begs explanation. Researchers asked couples to attempt to re-experience the discussion and report what they were thinking or feeling. Thus, it is unlikely that the directions biased couples against reporting their emotional state. It is also unlikely that the participants did not experience a variety of emotions during the interaction. The paucity of reported emotions may be explained by the way emotions function in general. Emotions are thought to result from evaluations of situations and are, therefore, more complex than other thoughts. Another possible explanation for the infrequency of attributions of emotion is their lack of temporal bounds. Emotions ebb and flow; they are not discrete in the way other thoughts are. Being continuous, emotions would be less noticeable than discrete thoughts. Thus, one's emotional state is a constant and is influenced by cognitions.

I also compared self-monitoring of emotions to perceptions of the partner's emotions, finding that over 80% of reported emotions were for the self. Thus, couples rarely empathized with their partner's emotional state during a conflictual discussion. This finding is less surprising. During conflict, it is difficult to see the other's point of view and more difficult to focus on their emotional state.

Whereas the deficit in reported emotions may cause some to label couples "emotional misers", the term cognitive miser would not stick. It would not apply because spouses are engaged in a wide variety of cognitions. Thoughts appraising self and partner comprised the most common grouping.

These thoughts ranged from complaints (e.g., "He never helps around the house") to neutral self-appraisal (e.g., "I work nights").

Discussion themes, referred to as strategies, identified couples' attention to the interaction itself (i.e. who said what). Thoughts in the strategy domain were divided by actor code. The comparison between self-identified strategies and perceived partner strategies is informative. Couples most carefully monitor their partner's avoidance; they most closely monitor their own constructive engagement. In addition, confrontation also contained more actor codes for partner than for self. Thus, the two negative strategy clusters were predominated by attributions of partner behavior whereas constructive behavior was attributed to the self.

#### Gender and Thoughts During Conflict

Some of the gender differences are instructive. Not only do the results confirm studies showing women's communication skill in empathy, but they also suggest strengths in husbands' communication. By far the sharpest difference between husbands and wives was in person focus. Wives were partner-focused and husbands were self-focused. The measure that showed this difference subtracted thoughts about the partner from thoughts about self. The result for men was that 10% more of their thoughts were focused on self than partner. For women, 14% more thoughts were partner-focused. This finding leads me to conclude that traditional gendered patterns of thinking are powerfully reflected in spouses' processing of their marital communication. Women's traditional concern for the other, and men's higher independence are pulling the scores for wives and husbands to opposite ends of this scale.

Wives thoughts about partner are more frequent than men's across all three domains: Strategy, appraisal, and emotion. However, the effect was

greatest for strategy. Effects of gender were significant for perceptions of partner confrontation, partner constructive engagement, and partner avoidance and approached significance for partner lying. Wives perceived that each of these strategies occurred more frequently than did husbands. These measures covered 15 different strategies which included 88% of partner strategies. Because wives closely monitored most of their husbands' behavior it is difficult to determine which behaviors stand out as particularly salient for them. However, the wives' mean for partner avoidance, was 7.3%, whereas the husbands' mean percentage was 2.6%. This difference, 4.7%, dwarfed the differences for the other strategies. Either husbands tended to avoid more than wives, or wives diligently monitored avoidance behavior in particular. Even though there was no interaction effect, there were main effects of both gender and aggression for partner avoidance. More perceptions of partner avoidance were associated with both wives and members of aggressive relationships. This finding seems to qualify Roberts and Krokoff's (1990) explanation for their results. To explain the connection between husbands' withdrawal and wives' hostility they noted that unhappy wives may be sensitized to avoidance. In the current study, wives were more sensitized to partner avoidance than their husbands (independent of either partner's marital adjustment).

For person appraisals, wives' focus on the partner stood out for rejection. Wives were twice as likely to reject their partner than husbands were likely to reject their partner. An extreme example of rejection from the data is "that damn man don't want to work... poor excuse for a man I'd say." Partner-focused thoughts of rejection are qualitatively different than other perceptions of the partner. These negative perceptions indicate that wives' focus on partner is not



an unequivocally positive trait. Although being other-focused can facilitate empathy, it also allows blaming.

In which areas do husbands' perspectives warrant attention? Their thoughts were the mirror-image of their wives in terms of self-versus-partner focus. Husbands thought more about their own strategies and their own characteristics than wives thought about themselves. Admission is an example of a self-appraisal theme that men reported more than women. Thus, the husbands' tended to accept responsibility for problems more than wives. Husbands were also more likely to agree with their partner. Note that as an appraisal, agreement does not characterize the statement, "I told her that she's right," because this statement refers to a discussion theme--what the participant did or said. Agreement, in this coding scheme, would include such recalled thoughts as "yes, she's right." The distinction is important because the husbands occasionally reported being careful *not* to verbally admit to their partner that she was right. However, mentally accepting responsibility for problems and agreeing with one's partner can be constructive, integrative ways to manage conflict. Husbands' were also more likely to elaborate on conflict issues. However, gender differences in elaboration and agreement were qualified by interaction effects with group, and are examined in depth below.

#### Marital Adjustment and Thoughts During Conflict

The easiest prediction for marital interaction research, that negative couples think and say more negative things than better adjusted couples, found only limited support in the present study. There were five correlations in the expected direction for wives' marital adjustment. Their marital adjustment was negatively associated with perceptions of partner confrontation and with rejection of the partner. These findings lend tepid support to results from earlier

research. For example, Noller et al. (1994) found that dissatisfied spouses report more negative behavior. Also, I found that wives' and husbands' marital adjustment were negatively correlated with pessimistic appraisals of the interaction. This association is not surprising. The majority of findings relating thoughts and emotions to marital adjustment were in line with previous research; however, the results were thin. Several expected associations were missing. The statistical insulation of effects of group from marital adjustment may partly account for the missing associations.

There was an intriguing association between partner anger and marital adjustment. Perceived partner anger was associated with lower marital adjustment among wives and higher adjustment in husbands. Although these associations are unusual, there is a likely explanation. Having a greater awareness of other's emotions on average, women who perceive angry spouses' are probably married to angrier men. On the other hand, men are typically less aware of other's emotions. Therefore, in marriages where the husband perceives more partner anger, it may be due to heightened awareness of his wife's emotions. Thus, these more sensitive men are better adjusted.

#### Aggressive Versus Nonaggressive Group

##### Observed results

The initial phase of this study (MIP, Leonard & Roberts, 1996), focused on the affects of alcohol administration upon conflict behavior, and included behavioral coding of the discussion using the MICS. These observer ratings of behaviors during the discussion were reported for each group. In the original study, the MIP research team found that baseline negativity and negative reciprocity for both husbands and wives was higher in the aggressive group (Leonard & Roberts, 1996).

### Recalled thoughts and emotions

The thoughts of aggressive couples did not match observer's ratings of their behavior. Furthermore, as with marital adjustment the prediction more anger and more perceptions of aversive behavior would be present in the aggressive group was only weakly supported. Although the thoughts and feelings of aggressive and nonaggressive couples did not match expectations for clear positive/negative differences, I did find other, more complex differences between the two groups.

Monitoring emotions. Although perceived partner dysphoria differed between aggressive and nonaggressive couples, based on their self-assessment, aggressive couples did not differ from nonaggressive couples in the extent to which they monitored anger and positive emotions. Thus, anger, which has been clearly linked to violence (Retzinger, 1994), was equally salient in both aggressive and nonaggressive marriages. Furthermore, aggressive couples did not report being more confrontive or hostile, did not make more hostile attributions, and did not perceive more of these negative behaviors for their partner! Thus, the obvious predication that couples in more hostile, angry relationships would report more negative, angry thoughts was not supported.

Two conclusions are possible from these data. The first one assumes that the base expectations are different between the two groups. A temperature analogy helps explain this conclusion. In an aggressive dyad, marital discussions are generally more heated. For these discussions, the aggressive couples' communication was rated more negatively (Leonard & Roberts, 1996). Because the couple is accustomed to the high negativity and anger, it is less salient and is not identified more often than nonaggressive couples notice their hot emotions and behaviors. In other words, even though the room with the

aggressive couple is hotter than the room with the nonaggressive couple, they have acclimated and the subjective ratings of participants provide equivalent reports.

A second line of reasoning also explains the lack of hot emotions from the aggressive dyads. Perhaps the aggressive couples are no angrier than nonaggressive couples (even though they interact more negatively). This explanation has high face validity for it is difficult to imagine a serious disagreement in which one does not experience anger. The difference between violent and nonviolent marriages, then, lies in the thoughts that accompany angry emotions. In other words, although both groups become heated during conflict, they manage the conflict and their emotions differently. The ways in which couples cognitively and communicatively manage their conflict can effect the likelihood of physical aggression.

Monitoring communication strategies. The differences between aggressive and nonaggressive couples' styles of monitoring communication is striking. Differences were present for constructive engagement-self, avoidance-self and avoidance-partner. Referring back to figure 6, notice that members of aggressive relationships reported themselves using constructive strategies more frequently and avoidance behavior less frequently than nonaggressive dyads. The interaction effect for self-identified constructive strategies suggested that *husbands* in aggressive marriages perceived their behavior more constructively, whereas wives perception of constructive engagement was not affected by group. Furthermore, aggressive dyads perceived more avoidance behavior for the partner. Thus, from an insider's perspective, the aggressive spouse is an outstanding communicator. The husband sees himself as more constructive, and both spouses see themselves as avoiding less than

nonaggressive spouses. However, the aggressive spouses' partner is seen as avoiding more than in nonaggressive relationships. A self-serving bias is present such that aggressive spouses do not notice their own avoidance, but diligently monitor their partner's avoidance. Being blind to their own negative behavior when clearly perceiving the flaws in their partner would seem to create a clear dichotomy for these spouses. Husbands (and to a lesser degree wives) in aggressive marriages view themselves as constructive and engaged and see their partners as avoiding the issue. This positive perception of their own strategies clearly flies in the face of independent ratings of their behavior (from the MIP) and the bulk of interaction research on physically aggressive couples. These couples, husbands especially, lack constructive communication skills (Cahn, 1995). It is likely that this misperception contributes to destructive conflict. The black-and-white picture that aggressive husbands develop of their discussions may lead to the rigid conflict escalation patterns found in previous research (e.g., Sabourin et al., 1993).

Appraisals. In addition to the clear differences for perceptions of strategies, there were two important effects for attention couples give to appraisals: Process and issue appraisals. The summary measure of process appraisal themes included direct perspectives for resolution, impasse, repetitious behavior, understanding, not understanding and other thoughts relating to the status or expected outcome of the discussion. Aggressive couples gave less attention to the process than nonaggressive couples. Thoughts about the process are more abstract than many of the other themes. They involve comparing the members of the dyad (understanding and not understanding), and include predictions about the outcome of the discussion. This cluster of thoughts could be used by nonaggressive couples to plan

communication strategies. For example, if one's spouse doesn't understand, one can think of a new way to help him or her understand. Monitoring the status of the discussion may assist functional dyads to avoid being locked into destructive conflict patterns. Scholars have noted that couples do not regularly engage in complex cognition during marital conflict (e.g., Fincham, Bradbury, & Scott, 1990). My findings clearly support this generalization, as less than 10% of thoughts during conflict were process appraisals. However, the difference between groups for these more complex thoughts is a notable exception to the general rule. Complex thinking, in the form of process appraisals, was more common in the nonaggressive group. This type of thinking may facilitate functional conflict management.

The effect of group was also significant for the cluster of pessimistic process appraisals, which is a subset of process appraisals. The relative size of these effects is graphically represented in figure 6. Because the effect of group for all process appraisals was primarily from the non-pessimistic themes, it is probable that the group difference for pessimistic appraisals reflects the amount of thought couples give to the process as a whole. In other words, the counter-intuitive finding that nonaggressive couples made more frequent pessimistic appraisals is presumably due to their tendency to be more process-oriented in general.

The most interesting difference between aggressive and nonaggressive couples was in the husbands' attention to the content of the discussion (i.e. the topic of disagreement). The summary measure of issue appraisal varied such that aggressive husbands' attention to content was lower than that of nonaggressive husbands. However, aggressive and nonaggressive wives were equally attentive to the content issue. The same effect was also present

for "solution", the least frequently identified issue appraisal theme. It is evident that the topic of disagreement is less salient to physically aggressive husbands than nonaggressive husbands. This finding extends and qualifies Noller et al's (1994) finding that dissatisfied spouses report less involvement in issues. My findings indicate that the thoughts of aggressive men (independent of satisfaction) were less focused on issues during conflict. Attention to the content is a key principle in the problem solving approach to conflict (Sillars & Wilmot, 1994). A lower level of attention to the issue is present among men in the aggressive group only. This finding gives support to the communication skills model for explaining marital violence, which posits that it is husbands' inability to express themselves verbally that leads to violence (Infante, Chandler & Rudd, 1989).

Just as husbands' thoughts varied between groups, the thoughts of aggressive wives were expected to be distinct from nonaggressive wives. Aggressive wives have been observed to behave differently from nonaggressive wives due to fear (Jacobson et al, 1994). Wives were expected to more closely monitor their own behavior and to be wary of their husbands' behavior: A walking-on-eggshells effect. The present study neither corroborated earlier findings nor supported my expectations. The first missing difference was that wives were not more watchful and cautious in aggressive marriages, which would be indicated by less frequent confrontive strategies and more avoidance in the aggressive group. Second, although several perceptions of negative partner strategy increased in the aggressive group and negative reactions to the partner were greater for wives than husbands, women in aggressive marriages did not notice significantly more negative partner behaviors and they were not more likely to reject their partner. In other words,

there was no interaction between the gender and group for perceived partner avoidance or perceived partner confrontation nor were any present for self-identified strategies.

The absence of interaction effects for wives is puzzling. The selection criteria for the project may have affected these findings. The criteria for participants excluded couples that acknowledged severe violence (i.e., "being beaten up more than three times in the past year" Leonard & Roberts, 1996, p. 7). Even though mildly violent couples were also excluded, the wives included in the sample were not the severely abused archetypes. The less severe nature of the physical aggression may, then, explain wives' lack of fear and the absence of an eggshell effect. On the other hand, my data still show that wives in aggressive relationships are distinguishable from wives in the nonaggressive group. The differences between wives of physically aggressive men and the other wives may be subsumed by the systemic differences of the dyad. Both members in aggressive marriages felt less agreement, noticed more partner avoidance, etc. As part of a dysfunctional marriage, wives in the aggressive group are clearly distinct from nonaggressive wives.

The absence of interaction effects for wives' thoughts during conflict combined with their focus on the partner creates an opportunity for new theorizing about communication strategies for women. The problem solving prescription for managing conflict did relate to findings for husbands, but wives' attention to conflict issues did not predict aggressive group or marital adjustment. Thus, wives in well-adjusted, nonaggressive relationships differ in other ways from wives in aggressive and less-adjusted marriages. Because gender is the principal factor that differentiates participants' thoughts during conflict, it may be that a different prescription for managing conflict should be



found for wives. The ways in which wives monitor interaction could be a valuable ingredient in such prescriptions. Wives' focus on their partners, including their higher frequency of meta-perspectives, is a valuable asset for constructive conflict. In addition to supporting the analytic style, communication scholars should investigate ways for wives to take advantage of this asset.

### Limitations

The complexity of the coding scheme created limitations for this study. Intercoder reliability required extensive training and constant scrutiny during coding. Certain codes were particularly difficult to distinguish. For example, the themes of complaint and disagreement were hard to differentiate. The complaint code focuses on the partner, while disagreement is issue-focused. Confusion arose when the issue was the partner or the partner's behavior. Missing data are also a cause for concern. Some video-assisted recall data were missing because of bad recordings and unresponsive participants. Because some participants decided not to respond, the respondents could differ systematically from the original MIP sample. To assess this possibility, the total percentage of aggressive couples in the original study was compared to the percentage that were included in the present analysis. The percentage of transcripts analyzed in the current study from the aggressive group was 3% less than the percentage of aggressive group participants in the original MIP dataset. Therefore, if the self-selected nonrespondents varied by group, the variance is small.

The thoughts of marital couples during conflict revealed much about their interactions. Women bring a focus on the partner whereas men focus on issues. Husbands who focus less on issues are more likely to be physically aggressive. Another key result was a self-serving bias for aggressive couples,

aggressive men in particular. These men view themselves as positive, constructive communicators and their wives as avoiding. Finally, nonaggressive couples think more about the direction of the discussion, the expected outcome, than physically aggressive couples. The broad view of thoughts during conflict along with the differences between aggressive and nonaggressive relationships points to more functional ways to approach intimate conflict.

## Appendix A

### CODING PROCEDURES -- VIDEO ASSISTED RECALL MARITAL INTERACTION PROJECT V. 2.0

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#### Background and Overview

The categories in the coding system describe thoughts and feelings reported during video-assisted recall of marital interaction. The coding scheme was designed to analyze data from the Marital Interaction Project (MIP), an extensive study of interaction patterns within abusive marriages. In the relevant portion of this project, married couples first engaged in a 15 minute conversation about a salient conflict in their relationship. The recall data were generated by replaying a videotape of the discussion to each individual spouse. At 20 second intervals, the tape was stopped and the person was asked to re-experience and report what s/he was thinking or feeling during that time. Spouses were not instructed to attend to any specific aspect of the discussion during the recall sessions. Thus, their reports provide a semi-naturalistic reconstruction of the thought-line of spouses during marital communication. The methods for coding video-assisted recall were inductively developed, based on a sample of data from the recall sessions. Approximately 500 recall segments from 83 transcripts were used to generate the coding categories through an iterative process of sorting, categorizing, and re-sorting recall statements.

The coding scheme is designed to reveal spouse's "on-line" processing of marital communication, including how they selectively monitor, interpret, anticipate, react to, and plan the discussion. The coding scheme particularly emphasizes (a) how communicative intentions or strategies are perceived; (b) emotions and cognitions that accompany perceived strategy; and (c) spontaneous differentiation of self versus partner perspectives (i.e., "direct perspectives" versus "meta perspectives").

Since the coding scheme is designed to code subjective accounts of interaction, not observational data, every report is treated as a thought or emotion, including references to behavior or descriptive information. Three main themes are distinguished: (a) **emotion**, (b) **strategy**, and (c) **appraisal**. Emotion refers to emotional states experienced during the discussion or recall session. Strategy refers to perceived or intended communicative acts. Appraisal refers to evaluation and analysis of the discussion or relationship.

Each main thematic category has several subcategories. In addition, there are several types of statements that are not codable as relevant thoughts or emotions.

Emotion and strategy statements (but not appraisal statements) also receive an **actor** code. The actor is the person who is presumed to experience or perform the emotion or strategy. The actor is coded as: (a) **self** (b) **partner**, or (c) **dyad**. For example, "I am angry," would be coded as "self," "she is angry," would be coded as "partner," and "we're both angry," would be coded as "dyad." Statements which attribute emotions or strategies to someone other than the speaker or partner are uncodable.

Finally, all statements except uncodables are coded for **perspective**. Perspective refers to the point of view described by a statement. Statements which describe the speaker's own point of view (e.g., "It's a problem") are coded as **direct perspectives**. Statements which describe the partner's point of view (e.g., "She thinks it's a problem") are coded as **meta perspectives**. Statements that describe a shared point of view (e.g., "We both think it's a problem") are also considered meta perspectives. Statements are not code "Meta" when it is redundant with partner. For example, "she feels sad" and "he's thinking about hitting me" are "Partner" but not "Meta".

Meta perspectives are most likely to occur under the appraisal category. For emotion and strategy statements, the perspective code is independent from and does not affect the actor code. For example, the statement, "I am angry" is coded as "direct" (perspective)/"self" (actor). "He is angry" is coded as "direct/partner." "He knows I am angry" is coded as "meta/self."

## General Principles of Coding

### Unit of Analysis

The basic unit of analysis is the simple sentence (subject-predicate combination) plus dependent clauses (i.e., subordinate clauses that rely on the main clause for meaning). This definition is designed to avoid the need for double coding, which increases if longer segments are coded. At the same time, smaller units are often unintelligible. Three exceptions to the basic rule were made. Reports of emotion (experienced during the conversation) were separated from the rest of the sentence, if the rest of the sentence made sense as a unit. Second, uncodable sentences were not separated into units. This rule limits the creation of nonsense codes. Finally, highly repetitive statements were not separated.

### Coding Sequence

To simplify the coding process, coders should make decisions in a particular sequence. First, determine the main thematic category that the unit falls under (emotion, strategy, appraisal, or uncodable). Second, for emotion

and strategy statements, determine the actor code (self, partner, or dyad). Third, determine whether the statement is a direct perspective or meta-perspective. Fourth, assign the unit to a specific thematic subcategory.

### Thematic Codes

Code the recall data from the *speaker's* perspective. For example, code units as "Admission" when *they* are making an admission, but not when their statement implies that they are responsible. Also, when it's not clear if a comment refers to a past event or to the current discussion, assume it applies to the present. A final general principal for themes is to "code the kernel" -- focus on the main idea expressed in the unit. For example, the new information is often the focus of the sentence.

### Code Priorities

In some cases a unit will fit into more than one thematic code. Two situations are possible: 1) the unit is difficult to clearly label in one category or another, and 2) the unit clearly belongs in more than one category. For the second situation, a priority list is used to assign a single code. However, for the second situation above, ambiguous examples, coders must decide which category fits the example best. Thus, the priority list is not used to resolve "borderline" judgments, when a single action or state could be categorized in one of two ways. For example, the statement, "he doesn't make sense to me," could be a reference to either "disagreement" or "not understanding." However, coding the statement should not reference the priority list since it refers to only one action or state (probably disagreement). The priority list is only applied to units that have two distinct thoughts (e.g., being angry and not listening). In cases where the data belong in multiple categories, instead of double coding these units, the prioritized order applies. The priority list is included after the definitions and examples of codes.

The priority list emphasizes communicative strategies and emotions, rating those domains above appraisals. Uncodable categories have the lowest priority. In other words, the "uncodable" category applies only when the entire unit is uncodable. Furthermore, narrower, less general categories have greater priority than more general categories within each cluster of strategies.

The priority list is thus used when multiple codes apply. The other situation, ambiguous units, remains. To ease borderline judgments between different codes, several specific rules apply:

- More specific codes take precedence over more general ones. For example, "Complaint" is a general code which does not apply when more specific codes like "Not Understanding" and "Hostile Attribution" would fit.
- When distinguishing between issue appraisal, "Elaboration", from partner or self appraisal, if the item discusses the individual then place it under personal appraisal (partner or self) even if it also discusses the issue.
- When distinguishing between "Disagreement" (26) and "Rejection" assign "Disagreement" if the focus is upon the idea and code "Rejection" when the focus is on the person.

### Uncodable Units

Units are considered uncodable if they are not interpretable as emotions or thoughts about the conversation or the relationship. Thus, statements about other people (extended family, friends, children, etc.) are not coded unless they also refer to an issue in the marital relationship (e.g., a parenting disagreement). Other examples of uncodable units include statements that are off topic or statements with unclear or insufficient content for coding. Different types of "uncodables" are distinguished by the coding scheme for descriptive purposes (e.g., to indicate how often subjects could not remember what they were thinking or feeling).

### **Summary of Codes**

THEMATIC DOMAIN	ACTOR (Emotion & Strategy Codes)	PERSPECTIVE
emotion	self	direct
strategy	partner	meta
appraisal	dyad	
uncodable		

### **Thematic Subcategories**

#### **EMOTION**

positive emotions  
dysphoria  
anger and frustration

#### **STRATEGY**

Constructive Engagement  
collaboration  
sharing information & disclosure  
soliciting & attending

#### **Avoidance and Detachment**

withdrawal  
topic shifting  
stonewalling  
censorship  
lying and insincerity  
giving in

#### **Confrontation**

dominating the floor

- assertion
- inflexibility
- exaggeration & distortion
- criticism and verbal aggression
- negative voice and appearance
- other aversive strategies

#### Neutral and Mixed Strategies

- initiation & termination
- general talk
- relationship repair
- joking

#### APPRAISAL

##### Issue Appraisal

- elaboration
- agreement
- disagreement
- solution

##### Person Appraisal

- self
  - positive & neutral
  - negative
  - denial & justification
- partner
  - positive & neutral
  - complaint
  - hostile attribution
  - rejection
- relationship
  - positive & neutral
  - negative

##### Process Appraisal

- understanding
- not understanding
- keeping score
- unexpected behavior
- repetitious behavior
- foreboding
- resolution/impasse
- intoxication

#### UNCODABLE

- other people

can't remember & don't know  
 thinking same as what was said  
 not thinking anything  
 no response  
 unclear & unintelligible  
 off topic

## Category Descriptions and Examples

### Emotion

The emotion codes describe affective states experienced by the subject or attributed to the partner within the immediate (experimental) situation. The purpose of these codes is to reconstruct conscious emotional experiences associated with the discussion. Thus, the codes do not apply to statements about emotions experienced in the past or in other contexts.

The actor code, in the case of emotion statements, is determined by the person who is presumed to experience the emotion (not the person who is the target of the emotion). For example, "I was mad at him," is coded as a "self" emotion. "He looks depressed" is coded as a "partner" emotion. "We're both getting frustrated," is coded as a shared emotion ("dyad").

1. **Positive emotions** -- happiness, relaxation, amusement, affection, love, positive excitement and other positive or pleasant emotional states.

(SELF)

so I felt good,

I was trying to think that I was happy,

cause I love him....

feeling more relaxed

subject laughs....I think it's really funny,

(PARTNER)

um I felt very loved right then,

I knew Dennis greatly loved me a lot,

2. **Dysphoria** -- sadness, unhappiness, apprehension, worry, depression, and similar emotions. This cluster of emotions is typically associated with subdued



or withdrawn reactions, thereby distinguishing it from the anger/frustration cluster.

(SELF)

I was starting to feel sad and hurt, I was feeling sadder and sadder by the minute.

Disappointed,

just trying to make reinforce the fact that you know, I'm worried and I don't want to loose her for something stupid like that.

I just wanted to....just felt awkward.

Can't remember.....right there I was thinking how stupid I was, how stupid I am.

(PARTNER)

and I was hoping that she wouldn't worry about this,

(META/SELF)

He can tell that I'm worried.

3. **Anger & frustration** -- being mad, angry, hot, irritated, frustrated, and so forth. In contrast to unhappiness/anxiety, this emotional cluster is associated with high arousal and reactivity and is typically less reflective and more externally-directed.

(SELF)

I don't name call unless I'm mad.....

and I'm really going crazy.....

I was really aggravated,

I f \_\_\_\_\_ hate, f \_\_\_\_\_ hate it,

I'm still frustrated and tense.

mad and frustrated

(PARTNER)

and it drives him crazy.

and when I keep talking just makes him madder. [also "dominating the floor"]

Now he's getting aggravated

that he was angry at me for not listening

he's scratches his head, taking off his baseball cap, now I'm getting to him at this point,

(DYAD)

We're getting more and more irritated,

(META/SELF)

He knows I'm mad.

### Strategy

The strategy code describes references to communicative acts and intentions. Strategy codes indicate what spouses are seen doing or attempting to do in the discussion. (This includes equivalent statements that are phrased negatively, for example, "He's not listening.")

The actor code, in the case of strategy codes, is assigned to the person who is presumed to initiate the strategy. For example, "I don't want to rehash this any more," describes the subject's own strategy and is coded as "self." "I was feeling that my husband wasn't communicating with me," describes the partner's strategy and is coded as "partner." (The phrase, "I was feeling..." is irrelevant.) "She ain't even paying attention" also refers to the partner's strategy. Meta perspectives are statements that describe the partner's perceptions of strategy (e.g., "He thinks I'm attacking him personally.").

### Constructive Engagement

5. **Collaboration** -- working together, compromising, trying to help or solve conflicts in a collaborative manner, and other cooperative acts.

(PARTNER)

He's being very cooperative,

That's great, he's compromising.

he was trying to help,

I felt like he meant well...

or is she tryin ta come to a conclusion where we can come off better in the end, or what....we see what happens.

I was happy he was giving me suggestions [also "positive emotion"]

(DYAD)

At that point in time we were compromisin,

I was agreein to call-in her and basically she was agreein ta doin somethin I wanted her ta do, meetin each other half way, and we bein alright.

I was thinking we should try to agree on things that we uh, both would like to do, which just isn't so easy.

I know that you know we talk about it and we discuss it and hopefully just be able to work it out.

if we haven't solved it we'll work it out,

**6. Information sharing & Disclosure** -- talking directly, openly, and noncompetitively about issues.

(SELF)

at that point I was trying.....was thinking that I have to make this as an open as possible to Sandy will be happy with whatever

and I was saying, just saying how it really is.

I was just letting her know why I didn't take care of it this week

Okay over here um.....I was just explaining how I...how I felt,

I'm trying to explain to him again you know, I wanted to save them,

(PARTNER)

I was glad he had some input. [also positive emotion]

I was thinking that I liked knowing how open she is cause he was....just thinking about it, talking about it nicely.

I'm glad he was saying that to me, [also positive emotion]

(DYAD)

and this is good for us that we are sitting here talking about this.

I was thinking that this was the longest time we had spoken on Mark's relationship to me and the way he was

Trying to examine all of the angles.

Thinking, we really needed to try and talk about the issues was at hand.

7. **Soliciting and attending** -- soliciting the other person's disclosure, attentive listening, and probing for significant information.

(SELF)

I want to see if she wanted to agree or disagree,

at least I'm trying to get her to talk about it,

I was trying to figure out if uh, what, what she was really... was afraid of, trying to pin it down.

I mean I just want to get at the truth,

I'm listening, go on.

#### Avoidance and Detachment

8. **Withdrawal** -- aloofness, lack of caring, disinterest, and other states that reflect lack of involvement in the conversation; also limiting one's involvement in the conversation by not talking, not listening, or trying to end the discussion.

(SELF)

and it was a waste of time sitting there babbling about nothing.

tell her not to talk to me about it -

because I don't want to get into an argument about it.

I wish this would end soon -

I was just....I was thinking to myself I don't want to rehash this anymore

that he was angry at me for not listening [also anger]

um, at that time I really wasn't paying attention to my husband,  
 but that he wasn't doing what he needed to do to get my attention,  
 I was pretty bored with this conversation.  
 and I don't really care.  
 I don't even want him to see that he's wrong...

(PARTNER)

um.....I was feeling that my husband wasn't communicating with me,  
 see he always tries to cut off things by period, like final, over, done with,  
 the way he was acting and the way he looked at me was like I really don't want  
 to answer this question.  
 I was thinking she just wanted to blow the whole thing off, and not argue about it  
 anymore.  
 now at that time, she ain't even paying attention to really what I said,  
 because he doesn't listen  
 seems that sometimes it's the way I feel that I should have to....make her look in  
 my face so she hears what I'm saying.  
 she not even thinking about the conversation no more.  
 it was like he didn't care at all.....  
 He really doesn't care about the subject any longer, I don't think,  
 and it didn't bother him at all.  
 she's falling asleep.

(DYAD)

but we don't let it be known, cause attitudes and everything come in.  
 wondering why we're so bored....

(META/SELF)

She knows I'm sick of talking about this.

9. **Topic shifting** -- changing the subject, bringing up irrelevant points, getting off track.

(SELF)

at this point, I was thinking that I was tired of the conversation and I wanted to change it.

(PARTNER)

You didn't answer my question - or my comment - ... huh.....

She's getting way off the point.

I don't think him bringing up his brother had anything to do with my situations, and he wanted to change the subject.

he was just doing what he wanted to do, saying what he wanted to say, didn't really didn't have anything to do with the argument.

(DYAD)

that it would, we were heading off the subject with,

how did we get on this subject now?

tryin to get back to the points of the agreement.....

Think I was thinking we should be talking about the subject of a the problem of the discussion that we're supposed to, and we're getting a little bit off track

10. **Stonewalling** -- denying the existence of a problem, making excuses, or denying one's role in a conflict.

(PARTNER)

he has not admitted once that he's wrong,

At this moment I'm thinking he's just making a lotta excuses....

and he doesn't acknowledge the fact that he does this to me a lot

I do remember feeling that he is putting off on everyone else that he's refusing to see his own problems.....

See there....she again....I felt like she was trying to uh....deny that there was a problem,

11. **Censorship** -- monitoring and controlling one's own communication in anticipation of negative or hostile reactions from the other person.

(SELF)

that made a difference, I almost said the wrong thing, all of em by you,

I am just going to have to control what I say.

and I am containing my emotions so that I don't over load and let it all spill out now....

and I should have known not to start it,

I'd love to throw a couple things back out at ya,

12. **Lying and insincerity** -- lies, insincere assurances and promises.

(SELF)

I was tryin to agree with her so I could go and use the rest room,

(PARTNER)

he only tells me part of the story,

Oh, I was feeling suspicious.

lying, he's lying.....

I remember thinking I know he doesn't mean that, he really wants to go out with his friends, and are going to,

but I felt like he wasn't gonna do it, he's not gonna do it at all,

so just tryin to get me to shut up, he just be tryin agreein,

(META/PARTNER)

He knows that's a lie [referring to the partner's statement].

13. **Giving in** -- giving in to the other person. The language associated with examples generally implies that concessions are made grudgingly or to avoid further argument, not in a cooperative and voluntary spirit (as in some examples of "collaboration").

(SELF)

okay, still not getting anywhere, had to give in.

this is a point where I had to give in.

[I] had to give in.

but knowing Liana, I had to give in to this,

I'm giving in, just like I always do,

(DYAD)

its just up to the first one to give in.....

#### Confrontation

14. **Dominating the floor** -- limiting the opportunity for the other person to talk through interruption, long speeches, or refusal to yield the floor.

(SELF)

that I'll just keep on talking

(PARTNER)

I'll have to say she mostly gets the most words in,

This might be a lecture video.

he always cuts me off, which is as usual.

15. **Assertion & Inflexibility** -- assertively arguing one's own opinion or position, refusal to yield or compromise, or blocking the other person's strategy.

(SELF)

Trying to get through to her head what is going on.



just trying to get my point across.

and I'm not going to let that happen,

I was basically callin her bluff,

I just wanted an answer - as to why it took him so long...

this is.... this is when we really get into it, you know, when she's not making sense, and I tell her,

(PARTNER)

she's...she's going to pick at anything she can, to... to convince me.

see, there we go, he's trying to prove a point.

is she tryin to keep disagreein

I was thinking that I can't believe her arguing again,

(DYAD)

There we go, we startin to argue again,

we startin to debate, disagreein again,

#### 54. Inflexibility

(PARTNER)

I was thinking okay here we go, he's always right.

he made me feel like I was wrong, when I'm not.

She seems to see things only one way. Her way. Maybe I'm wrong, seems pretty much her way.

because she wasn't to give at all, she wasn't going to give at all....so...

and like all women, they hate to be wrong, know what I'm saying,

(DYAD)

I'll say the same thing, we're both stubborn, and we both think we're right.

well, to be honest with ya, she's very stubborn, like me,

16. **Exaggeration and distortion** -- exaggerating or distorting a point in the course of an argument.

(SELF)

you know a lot of times when I'm listening to things I will jump to conclusions and not get the entire situation and already start making decisions and presumptions.

I jump to conclusions I think.

(PARTNER)

she's over reacting,

I thought she was exaggerating, make me seem like I come home and get in trouble all the time when I'm out.

uh, he does make a bigger deal of it than it is,

told ya she makes mountains out of ant hills.

trying to change it now, she'll move it all, make it feel better, to make my way still seem hard, and her way, the best way, the easy way.

17. **Criticism and verbal aggression** -- personal criticism, blaming statements, put downs, personal attacks, yelling, swearing, and other hostile and aggressive forms of communication.

(SELF)

I was trying to put Tina in a guilt trip here,

subject yawns.....felt like messing with her brain, see if I could piss her off like she is pissing me off.

so, keep my mind off that, so I yell at her, dog shit basically.....

(PARTNER)

I felt like again, he was just throwin the blame all on me.

because in a way he's making me feel like it's my fault that uh, we argue so vehemently at times,

because she was trying to push my buttons, on huh,

and because of this she criticizes me for wanting to do things outside of the home.

I just thought it wasn't a very nice thing to say at me.

oh well, I was thinking that he always trying to put me down about that,

and he uses that hon with me....that same kind of putting me in my place....hon.....!!!!

she just want to say, she can verbally attack me, whenever I do something wrong, whenever I say something wrong, instead of talking to me like a human being.

(META/SELF)

He thinks I'm attacking him personally.

18. **Negative voice & appearance** -- negative tone of voice, facial expressions, posture, and other nonverbal behavior.

(SELF)

I know that just by the tone of my voice.....

(PARTNER)

its like, I even said....I said to her are you sure, and she says well excuse me, you know and she rolls her eye balls...

I'm thinking, he looks so pitiful, I mean, get your hands off of your head, you look so incredibly pitiful,

it's not a nice calm tone I guess....whatever that may be.

That look he gave me I just wanted to....I don't know - slap him or something....[also violence]

now she look, we physically got to a confrontation,

19. **Other aversive strategies** -- other negative communication strategies that are idiosyncratic to particular people, contexts, or relationships.

(SELF)

subject laughs.....hm....Karen's try to get serious again, thinks I'm getting a little crazy.

(PARTNER)

Guilt.....Heavy guilt trip, coming down....guilt, guilt, guilt, got a have some guilt, oh my God.....I have been guilted. (subject laughs....

because uh....I knew she wanted some water, but yet, she didn't....didn't want to just say she wanted some water, she kind of wanted to drag me into it.

but don't put me in the middle of it.

he always wants to use lying as an example,

I was thinking he's always trying to say, what if, what if, you know, and putting the problem in hypothetical

he always say it's ours, and every time I say mine, he gets an attitude, so I was thinking ours.

because he admitted that I was getting aggravated,

she's crying more than talking,

but I was thinking here we go with this big uh, physiological explanation of why we shouldn't do it.

### Neutral and Mixed Strategies

20. **Initiation & Termination** -- trying to initiate or stimulate conversation, bringing the conversation to a close or anticipating the end of the discussion. Both initiation and termination are neutral strategies which do not represent clear attempts to confront or avoid issues. Do not confuse these codes with disclosure, topic shifting, withdrawal or other strategies designed to increase or minimize direct discussion of conflict issues.

(SELF)

I ain't got no more to say on that,

I was just trying to get her off the ground - trying to get started.

subject giggles.....I guess I was thinking that uh, how are we going to start this conversation off.

trying to think of something to say.

(PARTNER)

well he is probably going to want to want to get moving.

(DYAD)

and huh, we weren't going to talk about it anymore,

nothing else to talk about.

I was thinking that now we're getting to the end of the discussion.

Well I remember thinking just about now that huh, that discussion was over

oh, basically running out of things to say about the socks.....

21. **General talk** -- neutral conversation and small talk.

(SELF)

and I was just about to bring that up.

(DYAD)

um, kind of about the subject, just talking about it,

We were recapping what we had said about Mark.

just the gen conversation here, not really a problem at all.

Over here we were just making small talk basically, it's we....

same thing as last time, just talking about the cars, nothing there.

22. **Relationship repair** -- attempting or wanting to soothe negative feelings and reduce hostile conflict.

(SELF)

I can't remember what I was thinkin., all I know was I was tryin to please her....

uh, I was just trying to make Penny to feel a little better,

I don't want to argue about this all the time like we have been.....

I just want us to be in harmony with each other, more than just at each other's throats, I was thinking.

I was thinking exactly what I was talking about, I was thinking, just let's relax and talk, you know, rather than jabbing at each other and try to win.

23. **Joking** -- making non hostile jokes, being silly or funny.

(SELF)

I was thinking I had slowed her down a little bit with jokes, trying joking with her,

I was uh trying to make a joke of it I guess,

because I was thinking about making her laugh really.. until hmmmmmm - when she watches it maybe for an hour - half hour -

(PARTNER)

seems like everything's a joke to him,

He's tryin to make light of it.

I remember thinking he was being kind of silly,

sarcastic, she being funny,

(DYAD)

we use humor a lot to release tension. subject giggles.

oh I don't know, we were just trying to loosen up the atmosphere here a little bit maybe, at least that's how I felt.

### Appraisal

Appraisal refers to evaluation and analysis of the discussion or relationship. For example, subjects may elaborate on arguments made in the discussion, evaluate statements made by the partner, express criticism of the partner, or comment on the progress of the discussion. Appraisal codes are further organized into three sub-areas: (a) **issue appraisal**, (b) **person appraisal**, and (c) **process appraisal**. Issue appraisal represents continued reflection about the issues in the discussion. Issue appraisal typically resembles continuation of the dialogue. Person appraisal represents

evaluation of self, partner, and relationship. Person appraisal typically involves trait attributions and attributions of responsibility for conflicts. Process appraisal describes current status and expected outcome of the discussion.

Although some appraisal codes have outward similarities to strategy codes, the strategy codes refer to actions (performed or intended), whereas the appraisal codes refer to passive/internal reactions. For example, the statement, "He's putting all the blame on me" refers to the partner's communication and is coded as strategy. By contrast, the statement, "It's not all my fault" identifies an internal reaction or appraisal, rather than a communicative act.

Appraisal statements do not receive a separate "actor" code because the actor is clear from the definition of each code. Direct perspectives are statements that identify the subject's own appraisal. Meta perspective are statements that identify the partner's appraisal. For example, the statement, "It's not all my fault" is a direct perspective. The statement, "He thinks it isn't his fault" is a meta perspective. Most instances of meta perspectives are likely to occur under the appraisal category.

### Issue Appraisal

24. **Elaboration** -- neutral elaboration and analysis of relationship issues. Unlike the person appraisal codes, elaboration statements focus on impersonal aspects of the relationship, such as situational events, perceptions, and behaviors or objective circumstances. Thus, elaboration statements do not imply an evaluation of either person or the relationship.

didn't think of it that way before.

and you know the minute he comes home going to work and it would be good to get out, you know it whether it be for errands or whatever.

I was thinking that maybe I will have one more child, but not right now.

he's with a lot of people, that know what they're doing,

thinking we're basing everything on the fact that we get this house, and it's still up in the air,

(META)

That's the one thing - smoking cigarettes is - we hate it

25. **Agreement** -- agreeing with the opinions or ideas of the other person

I felt in agreement,

Oh, he's right, um....I....I know....I agree with him, he is right,  
she is actually correct.....

yet he is right, my father did show up every day,  
that makes, that's a good point, that's a good point.

(META)

see, she's almost saying, gee maybe you're right,

26. **Disagreement** -- disagreeing with the ideas or opinions of the other person; statements that refute or contradict the opinions or ideas of the other person.

It doesn't make sense to me, I didn't think it made sense to me when she said it,  
eh....I thought he was kind of off base saying well who knows how our kids are  
going to turn out

you know I kind of didn't like when he said that well if they're religious freaks let  
em move out or something like that,

that's wrong....

and I don't agree with what he sayin,

I was thinking at that time, well he's getting his stories mixed up, because his  
aunt Bell don't watch kids on the weekends,

whenever we say we...he'll stay out of it, he doesn't really stay out of it.

and, cause she was wrong about the time, you know....

yeah see...you want to invite people, uh yeah your parents are people

(META)

[he thinks] he's right and I'm wrong.

and I sensed that she didn't agree

she's still preoccupied though....not convinced yet,



28. **Solution** -- thoughts about solutions to conflicts and problems.

I was thinking well what are we going to do,

I was just...just...at that point I was thinking....I got to try to think of something that will make her happy and me happy and everyone happy, and so I was just....that's what I was thinking.

What's a solution, good question, good question.....uh.....I don't know if I know a solution

I don't remember exactly what I was thinking, or feeling, I know I was feeling that I should probably just try to straighten this thing out the best I can for now,

I want to know what you think our solution is - what can we do about it? -

I don't know where that I can do or say to make her get over it,

(META)

HE looks like he's searching for..hummm....answers.

#### Person Appraisal--Self

29. **Neutral & Positive** -- neutral or positive evaluation of one's own traits, behaviors, or ideas.

I've definitely improved.....I was thinking that...how I've improved.

I'm a night person.

I'm not from Buffalo.

30. **Negative** -- Self-criticism and admitting or accepting responsibility for problems alluded to in the discussion.

it's probably my fault, it's all my fault probably,

I don't realize I do it....

and I was starting to see humor in that [being too demanding on husband] I guess.

I have a.....a fluke about me that I can't just go in a store and get one thing and come back out, I always have to look around,

I was thinking about --- I go out a lot and that but, I should spend more time with her -

(META)

cause I look like a meany,

He thinks that all I do is just sit around the house.

31. **Denial & Justification** -- denying, minimizing, justifying or excusing one's own role in problems and conflicts.

I'm not yelling....

and she's as bad as I am in that tone.

and I don't think that it's all my fault.

that some of it's his blame to,

I remember thinking I know I put them scissors back,

its just me and her, there's nobody there to see it,

I didn't think it was important at the time -

remember thinking I was only doing it so that he don't have to...

why did I gamble you know, cause we was in the hole, and I needed, and we needed money, I do what I can do best,

#### Person Appraisal--Partner

32. **Neutral & Positive** -- neutral or positive evaluation of the partner's traits, behaviors, or ideas.

she's a morning person,

she's a good girl at heart,

cause if there was something I'd need, she would give it to me,

subject laughs....think he's being a good sport....is what I'm thinking..he usually is about most things.

because he's...he's not necessarily going to be like his parents or have a relationship like the current relationship he has now with his parents.

but I....she has been getting better at it too, it's helped.

what has he done? well lately he's cut down I got ta say.

I'm glad that he made the effort,

33. **Complaint** -- ongoing dissatisfactions with the other person. Note that complaints may be direct or indirect. Direct complaints explicitly state the source of dissatisfaction. Indirect complaints elaborate on the rationale for direct complaints (stated or unstated). Since indirect complaints are not fully explicit, this code requires some attention to the context of a statement.

I just wish he would stop smoking, but it's his life.

she is never on time,

remembering back him going out with his friends a lot when I was carrying the baby, and come home, and he was either drunk, or very high.

this is a grown man, but he should put his things away,

I just want to be more appreciated,

(INDIRECT)

I don't think anyone should go any place uninvited,

but it's not like you're there watching the washer machine waiting for it to be done you can go do something else in between.

and it [paying bills] got to wait sometimes, things come before them.

and I was there alone, he was there in the delivery room,

I mean there are things that I don't like to do too, that I do.

(META)

I remember thinking that she thinks that I'm over weight

and that uh, she thinks that I give in too easily to my mother

34. **Hostile Attribution** -- criticizing the motives and intentions of the other person.

can't believe she married me for my money....

he doesn't care if she's not wanted over there just drop her off so we can go out, to satisfy his own pleasures.

and if he...if I make him just go to my sister's house he's going to have a miserable time and be sure of.

that everybody owes us, every time we do a favor for them, that they should owe us a favor.

she just totally stays away from my family, on purpose,

At this time I was thinking all he cares about is himself, he doesn't care about us.

35. **Rejection** -- general negative regard for the partner and hostile reactions to the partner's opinions or behavior.

obviously he don't really know what an adult means yet.

I just hate it when she does that,

and at that point, that wasn't what I wanted to hear.

thinking she was full of shit.

and I remember thinking this guy is a real jerk

Thinking about what a bitch she is.

He started getting his little attitude right there -

wow, you'd let me have company, how gracious of you.

#### Person Appraisal--Relationship

36. **Positive & Neutral** -- neutral, positive, or optimistic evaluation of the relationship.

We'll learn to live with each other,

right now we are both adjusting to having a five and a half month old baby and that's our major thing right, getting used to that.

we're just trying....we are just two people that got married trying to do the best that we can do,

and that soon we are in a house, and things hopefully will be different, we will be more organized.

it's not as bad as the first six months,

37. **Negative** -- negative or pessimistic evaluations of the relationship.

well here we have a video prime example of our immaturity,

it's crazy..like a fatal attraction.

### Process Appraisal

38. **Understanding** -- statements that express understanding or a willingness to understand the partner. Note that understanding does not necessarily imply agreement. In this case, meta perspectives are statements that attribute understanding to the partner.

I'm willing to see hers (point of view),

and I can see his point of view when he speaks that way,

I understand his side,

if I could remember the sock being left underneath the couch, I knew what she was talking about.

I remember thinking how uh...I understood how she couldn't be cordial

(META)

he understood me.

yeah.....I,...I'm glad to see that you know he...he can...he can understand why I feel the way that he doesn't think that um, that my fears are unwarranted or ridiculous that

I think he realizes how I feel,

she know what I'm saying.

cause my wife knew what was happening she ain't sleep to what's happening know what I'm saying,

39. **Not understanding** -- statements that express a lack of understanding or confusion about the partner. Note that misunderstanding does not necessarily imply disagreement. Meta perspectives are statements that attribute lack of understanding to the partner.

now I'm confused as to what he's telling me,

wondering why she was wondering why do I smoke.

I don't understand his rationalization

and I couldn't understand why he was saying what he was saying,

confused, totally confused,

I think I was reeling at this point.....

I don't know what to tell her.

yeah, I hadn't even heard of achievement or even mentioned it before until now,  
and threw me off, it really threw me off,

(META)

she looks perplexed right now.

just wish she'd see my light,

I was feeling a little frustrated that he couldn't understand that.  
[also frustration]

he just, he don't realize what I'm saying,

I just wanted him to understand my feelings,

he's not gonna understand where I'm comin from.

I just think that we both have to be more understanding,

40. **Keeping score** -- references to who is wining, losing, or expected to prevail in the discussion.

she won't win at all either,

I was thinking I was getting back on the upper hand,

I was starting to take control of the situation.

I knew she was actually getting back at the upper hand.

Hum - he just seemed like he was in for a losing battle....

we are at a point where I realize no one is going to win -

41. **Unexpected behavior** -- the discussion is seen as unexpected or out of character (i.e., a violation of expectations).

he usually doesn't say that to me,

I can't believe he said that,

we usually don't sit down and try and resolve the problems, ongoing,

42. **Repetitious behavior** -- the discussion is described as repetitive and highly predictable.

Same old shit, I go through this every day,

and I've reiterated these things several times,

we've been through it a hundred times, my driving, not real good.

she gets like this at least every day, if not every other day,

yeah he's like a never ending road he just.....this conversation.....this is how it is every day.....

43. **Foreboding** -- some aspect of the discussion provokes negative anticipation.

I remember thinking, this was going to be a kind of a long discussion.

Oh I started something this time

this is.... This is when we really get into it, you know, when she's not making sense, and I tell her, and I try, you know, we ensue it and we usually get into worse, [also assertion]

I'm ready for a good argument now.

I'm going to hear about that when I go home. (Subject laughs.....Giggles.....)

44. **Resolution** -- Progress or resolution of problems is anticipated based on the discussion.

I like it, if we could do things this way, it'd be great.

I felt like we could accomplish something there, you know that...

I feel we're finally getting somewhere.

we had talked at length on this before, but nonetheless the content wasn't as valuable.

um I was thinking it's kind of solved,

but I don't know if this is really going to work or not, we'll have to try it.

45. **Impasse** -- Lack of progress or resolution is anticipated based on the discussion.

and we're not really resolving this problem.

it's a subject that just really goes nowhere,

at the time I'm not making any progress,

we can talk for hours about this.....and it never gets resolved.....

I felt like the conversation was lost,

I felt like it's hopeless.....

(META)

because we both know that we're not getting anywhere,

46. **Intoxication** -- statements about the husbands' current state of intoxication. Do not apply this code to general discussion of drinking or drunkenness that does not refer to the immediate situation.

I remember feeling really uh intoxicated by the alcohol at that point.

trying to figure out if I'm smashed or not, subject giggles, then whistles.

Oh, I was thinkin to myself, I was kinda tipsy,



good thing you guys gave me a few drinks....[also distraction?]

I could tell that alcohol was starting to influence him and his attitude.

because he was slightly influenced.

and that I definitely knew he was drinking

I remember thinking that...definitely know he drank when he started talking about that,

he gets silly when he drinks.

### Uncodables

Units are considered uncodable if they are not interpretable as emotions or thoughts about the conversation or the relationship. Most of the examples here are self evident and left without further definition.

47. **Other people** -- thoughts or feelings about other people (children, friends, extended family, etc.) that do not otherwise refer to issues in the marriage. Note that statements about other people which are completely irrelevant to the discussion should be coded as "off topic" (see the "baby-sitter" example under this category).

I feel that is the most important, we need to get her sister to watch my daughter,

I don't like my daughter being in an environment with all the smoke, even though....

we feel that we should do the same thing to them,  
I don't hang out with people like that

Well, the baby likes to get in the plants, got into it, knocked it off,

this is a things that I'm', hearing from my side of the family

48. **Can't remember and don't know.**

can't remember.

I don't know what I'm doing here

uh, I don't know what I was thinking at this point.

but you should. I can't really say any more I don't know.

I can't remember what I was thinking about.

49. **Thinking same as what was said**

I said what I was thinking then.

really thinking about what I said, what the punch burn,

subject giggles....I was just thinking the same...same thing.

I said exactly what I was thinking then.

what I was thinking is being said right after this.

50. **Not thinking anything**

I don't know....wasn't really thinking anything.

I wasn't really thinking anything at that time -

hm.....nothing.....

51. **No response** -- the person's comments provide insufficient information for coding.

subject laughs.....

OHHHHHHH -

For from here on in, I was mainly thinking the same thing I was thinking the last time I was thinking.

I have no comment.

(sings this).....\_\_\_God, I love this place, ONLY A JOKE.....only a joke.\_\_\_\_

52. **Unclear and unintelligible**

It's inevitable, I mean, I don't believe....she, I don't know,

course there are [missing words?] more stubborn than me.

she talk...she only think what she talk.

Because it was what she was saying.

See over here I felt like we were getting a little....a little bit,

Think I was feeling..[inaudible].

53. **Off topic** -- the reported thoughts and feelings are not relevant to the discussion or marital relationship.

I was thinking about my kids, and was thinking what they're doing and are they giving the baby-sitter any problems.

I was thinking of my cat, Alfred....

wondering what we had to do for the next two hours is,

and I was sittin there laughin and thinkin about other things, while I was sittin here doin this little survey or big survey.....

thinking that I really had to go to the bathroom.

got a headache, dying for a cigarette, I was thinking, I needed a cigarette real bad,

Thinking about the way it was sitting in a room being video taped.....

we're both hesitating because we got cameras on us,

okay this is kind of weird.

subject giggles.....just thinking probably he really has to go to the bathroom right now subject giggles.

Just basically feeling how the environment is around and how we feel about doing the survey. Feels basically the same as it does at home.

#### Priority List

#### STRATEGY

#### AVOIDANCE AND DETACHMENT

9 10 11 8 12 13

#### CONFRONTATION

17 18 16 14 15 54 19

#### CONSTRUCTIVE

5 6 7

## MIXED AND NEUTRAL

22 23 20 21

## EMOTION

1 3 2

## APPRAISAL

26 Disagree

25 Agree

39 Not understanding

38 Understanding

34 Hostile attribution

35 Rejection

31 Denial and justification

30 Admission

33 Complaint

40 Keeping score

42 Repetitious behavior

43 Foreboding

44 Resolution

28 Solution

45 Impasse

46 Intoxication

41 Unexpected Behavior

32 Neutral partner

29 Neutral self

24 Elaboration

37 Negative relationship

36 Negative relationship

## UNCODABLES

47 50 49 53 52 51 48

Appendix B  
Thematic Subcategories and Percentage of Codable Responses.

Emotion	
Positive Emotions	2.2%
Dysphoria	2.5%
Anger	5.0%
Strategy	
Collaboration	1.7%
Information Sharing and Disclosure	2.2%
Soliciting and Attending	1.8%
Withdrawal	4.3%
Topic Shifting	2.2%
Stonewalling	1.4%
Censorship	.6%
Lying and Insincerity	1.4%
Giving In	.4%
Dominating the Floor	.4%
Assertion	2.6%
Inflexibility	1.0%
Exaggeration and Distortion	.6%
Criticism and Verbal Aggression	1.9%
Negative Voice and Appearance	.7%
Other Aversive Strategies	.9%
Initiation and Termination	1.1%
General Talk	.8%
Relationship Repair	.6%
Joking	1.5%
Appraisal	
Elaboration	9.5%
Agreement	3.4%
Disagreement	8.7%
Solution	1.4%
Neutral and Positive (Self)	4.7%
Admission	2.6%
Denial and Justification	2.7%
Neutral and Positive (Partner)	4.8%
Complaint	8.3%
Hostile Attribution	1.9%
Rejection	3.2%
Neutral and Positive (Relationship)	.7%
Negative (Relationship)	.3%
Understanding	2.0%
Not Understanding	3.2%
Keeping Score	.4%
Unexpected Behavior	.3%
Repetitious Behavior	1.3%
Foreboding	.4%
Resolution	1.0%
Impasse	1.5%
Intoxication	.8%
Total	100.0%

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